

## Durham Research Online

---

### Deposited in DRO:

23 August 2010

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Sutherland, Claire (2010) 'Soldered states : nation-building in Germany and Vietnam.', Manchester: Manchester University Press.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<http://www.manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/catalogue/book.asp?id=1204446>

### Publisher's copyright statement:

### Additional information:

Sample chapter deposited. Chapter 2: 'Nation and region', pp.36-78.

## Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

## 2 Nation and region

This chapter explores the contention that Germany and Vietnam were both divided states and divided nations before their respective (re)unification in 1990 and 1976. International recognition of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) varied along the ideological lines of the Cold War, but the official date of state unification goes largely undisputed. The division of a nation is a far more difficult case to argue, however, let alone measure. Elsewhere I have studied political parties (Sutherland 2001, 2006a) and intellectuals (Sutherland 2006c) as agents of nationalist ideology. In this case, the focus on state fusion and nation-building calls for analysis of macro-level actors, namely the governments who negotiate these changes. Recent academic works entitled *Vietnam: Borderless Histories* (Tran & Reid 2006) and *German History from the Margins* (Gregor *et al* 2006) show that, contrary to what nation-building ideology might suggest, neither country's history can be viewed as the single, linear progression of a homogenous whole. Indeed, Vietnam and Germany did not exist as unified states until 1802 and 1871 respectively. Prior to these dates, the term 'nation-state' was certainly a misnomer. Today, the presence of ethnic minorities in both states and the existence of an international diaspora indicate that an ethnic Vietnamese or German nation is not coterminous with state borders. Government definitions of the national community may be more or less exclusive, thereby affecting the status of

ethnic minorities living on state territory, citizenship and immigration regimes, and also the Vietnamese and German diasporas.

Nation-building in the GDR and the FRG revolved around their competing claims to be the sole legitimate representative, or “rightful political embodiment” (McKay 1998, 3) of the German nation. Each state initially supported unification as a means of extending its political system across both territories, with the FRG eventually doing just that in 1990. In contrast to consistent West German support, the retreat of the GDR’s ruling Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* - SED) from the goal of German unity lasted from 1970 until the fall of the Berlin Wall. The 1976 SED party programme tied its own legitimacy “to everything progressive in the history of the German people” (cited in McKay 1998, 120). This exemplifies the ‘direct line’ or *longue durée* approach to nation-building, which seeks to derive current legitimation from a long historical lineage (Ludz 1977, 246). A similar strategy has been used consistently by the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), which has blended communist ideology with nationalism throughout its history. For instance, Võ Nguyên Giáp, the general who masterminded victory over the French colonial power at the battle of Điện Biên Phủ in May 1954, was fond of repeating that revolutionary strategy had its direct antecedent in past wars against the Chinese (Turley 1980, 72). The SED’s nationalist ideology changed quite radically with its pragmatic political interest in achieving international recognition for the GDR and placating the Soviet Union. This contributed to the limited impact of its propaganda on domestic legitimacy or citizens’ evolving sense of German - and GDR -

identity. In West Germany, on the other hand, the principle of German unity embodied in its Basic Law was complemented by a strong commitment to European integration from its inception in the 1950s. Though Vietnam's membership of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is more recent, the VCP's regionalist ideology shared both Germanies' goal of buttressing the nation-state.

## **I Vietnamese nation-building**

Today's Vietnamese state is a creature of conquest. Following a millennium of Chinese rule ending in the tenth century, the inhabitants of the Red River Delta began to extend their territorial reach from the eleventh century onwards, expanding progressively southwards into the lands of the once mighty Cham and Khmer civilisations. By 1471, the Cham empire had all but disappeared, its last vestiges wiped out by the nineteenth century Nguyễn emperors (Maspero 1928). By the mid-eighteenth century, Vietnamese soldier and peasant settlers had reached the Mekong delta, a process which pushed back Khmer control but left large numbers of ethnic Khmer in place. Effectively partitioned during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the Vietnamese empire would be unified in 1802 under Gia Long, founder of the Nguyễn dynasty. French conquest soon followed, however, and by 1887 Vietnam had been divided into three administrative zones within French Indochina, partly designed to weaken any sense of national unity.

Mountain ranges and climatic variations characterise a country stretching over two thousand kilometres, from the overpopulated rice plains of the Red River Delta in the north to the fertile and expansive Mekong Delta in the sub-tropical south. Politically, mountain passes marked Vietnam's seventeenth century division into rival regions and twentieth century schism into two republics. There are also uniting topographical features, however. The Trường Sơn mountain range, for instance, Vietnam's 'backbone' running for two thirds of its length, was of strategic importance to successive imperial dynasties. It was also the site of the Ho Chi Minh trail, which played a key part in the DRV's official war effort to "liberate the South and to unify the country" (Khoi 2001, 66). Contrasting living conditions, historical settlement and ethnic mixes across the country go some way towards explaining commonly held stereotypes amongst Vietnamese themselves (Li 1998, 156). It is important to note that the division of Vietnam's current territory during the seventeenth and eighteenth century also did much to foster "two different ways of being Vietnamese" (Li 1998, 12). For instance, northerners can be portrayed as more reserved and frugal than southerners, who are reputed to be rather spendthrift and fun-loving. Under the nominal rule of the Lê dynasty throughout, the northern and southern territories, or inner region (*Đàng Trong*) and outer region (*Đàng Ngoài*), were actually controlled by the rival Trịnh and Nguyễn lords respectively. Southern administration was characterised by the promotion of Buddhism, international trade and a distinct taxation system, the burden of which was none too heavy on its relatively expansive and fertile lands. Northern rule, on the other hand, remained firmly wedded to Confucian principles and a more isolationist agricultural economy across the limited

lands of the Red River Delta, going some way towards explaining the origins of the above stereotypes. The notional unity of Vietnamese history evidently does not go uncontested.

The legacy of Nguyễn Hoàng, the sixteenth century general originally sent southwards from Hanoi to pacify ‘pirates’ and Mạc rebels, but who definitively returned south in 1600 to establish his own rule there, has been largely ignored in today’s official Vietnamese historiography as undermining the nation-building myth of unity (Taylor 1993, 45). For Vietnamese historians “who were obliged to construct a national history that emanated from and evolved around Hanoi, such interpretations, with their claims and suggestions of southern autonomy, had to be carefully managed” (Pelley 2002, 31) following independence from colonialism in 1946. Western historians also continue to debate the significance of Nguyễn Hoàng’s actions, some suggesting that loyalty to lineage and land of origin overrode any ambitions for autonomy during much of the seventeenth century (Cooke 1998). Yet the year 1627, when Nguyễn Hoàng’s son stopped paying taxes to Hanoi (then Thăng Long) can be interpreted as a key event in establishing a separate polity and formalising the *de facto* disunity of which contemporary sources were well aware (Taylor 1993, 58). The resulting wars shaped southern life for much of the seventeenth century. By the turn of the eighteenth century, however, the Nguyễn lords were trying to establish themselves as monarchs, renaming themselves accordingly, applying (unsuccessfully) for separate recognition by their suzerains in Beijing, and even creating their own originary myth (Li 1993, 46, 101). Continual southward expansion was also encouraged under the

Nguyễn lords, and not their northern counterparts. Even the Nguyễn were not fully in control of the southern reaches of their rapidly expanding empire, however, which would eventually provide the basis of the Tây Sơn rebellion and their own downfall; “The final collapse of the Nguyễn regime in *Đàng Tròng*, therefore, seems to have had everything to do with its expansion in the southern and western directions. In merely two hundred years, this regime had acquired three-fifths of Vietnam’s contemporary territory” (Li 1993, 153). Yet only a century later, Vietnam would once again be divided, this time into the three French colonial *pays* of Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina.

When Nguyễn Ánh finally brought northern and southern territories together in 1802 under the name Gia Long, court historians were keen to cement his legitimacy by stressing an orderly transition from the previous Lê dynasty, conveniently ‘forgetting’ that “the Nguyễn regime destroyed national unity for two hundred years” (Li 1998, 13). Later, the VCP would be equally keen to stress its key nation-building myths of national unity and resistance to foreign aggression, inscribing the existence of *Đàng Tròng* within an orderly process of southward expansion (*nam tiến*), if at all. However, the suggestion that this was a smooth, centrally organised “linear progression” (Li 1998, 19) is misleading. Before the decisive defeat of the Cham empire by Lê Thánh Tông in 1471, conflicts were rather about prestige, people and treasure than a coherent policy of extending Vietnamese *Lebensraum* beyond the cramped Red River Delta. Thereafter, devastating wars between the Lê and the Mạc, compounded by failed crops and famine, caused many to flee southwards for

survival, and most officially sanctioned migration was in order to establish military outposts (Li 1998, 25). National unity was never a given.

If southern Vietnamese identity had anything distinctive, it was as a hybrid of local and immigrant cultures, which in some ways had more in common with other Southeast Asian civilisations than with China. It did not experience imposed Vietnamisation (Li 1993, 99, 156). Accordingly, some of the Sino-Vietnamese structures, rites and beliefs so central to life in the Red River Delta lost their significance in southern society. The village unit as an established source of family identity and community, for example, was undermined by the characteristic mobility of the southern settlers (Li 1993, 110). Today, patterns of religious worship also differ substantially across Vietnam. Whereas the cult of the Holy Mothers thrives in northern Vietnam, for instance (Ngo 2003), syncretic religions such as Hòa Hảo and Cao Đài are peculiar to the south (P. Taylor 2001, 17). At the same time, it would be dangerous simply to substitute a history of unity with one of division into two or even three parts. The aim here is merely to highlight that there are "many voices that undermine the idea of a single Vietnamese past" (Taylor 1995, 5). Nevertheless, an important strand of VCP nation-building is a consciously constructed narrative geared to legitimising and maintaining a unified Vietnamese nation-state within today's borders. Unsurprisingly, this eminently politicised view has poured scorn on Vietnamese historians of southern origin who emphasised regional identities or Nguyễn Hoàng's role in establishing what they saw as "the autonomy of culture and politics in the South" (Pelley



2002, 39), for instance. Yet the attitude of VCP ideologues towards southern particularities has not been consistent, either.

Immediately following unification in 1976, southern reluctance to implement collectivisation and nationalisation was vilified as 'backward' compared to the more 'advanced' communist system in the north (P. Taylor 2001, 26). Following *đổi mới*, however, this 'resistance' gained more positive connotations in some quarters, as southern experience of commerce and trade became worthy of attention and eventually emulation (P. Taylor 2001, 85, 90). Most official VCP spokesmen would note regional differences only to emphasise the overriding national patriotism of southern inhabitants, as exemplified by their home-grown communist heroes (P. Taylor 2001, 91). They asserted that despite the corrupting influence of the French and Americans, southern Vietnamese retained their ancestors' pioneering spirit and love of country. In the early 1980s, however, some official sources recognised southern particularities, suggesting that factors such as greater pragmatism, dynamism and 'modernity' made the region well placed to face the challenges of globalisation. This was sometimes couched in an alternative narrative of ancient origins, one which downplayed French colonial and 'neocolonial' U.S. influence in creating a narrative of southern diversity and openness to change. It highlighted indigenous traits, such as a pioneering spirit and a pre-colonial agricultural commodity economy, pointing to different settlement patterns from the archetypal, enclosed northern Vietnamese village as evidence of a more syncretic and fluid way of life. These traits are sometimes used to link the ancient *Sa Huỳnh* and *Óc Eo* civilisations of

southern Vietnam to regional characteristics, thereby apparently acknowledging their indigenous descendants alongside Vietnamese settlers. In constructing a sea-oriented, trading tradition and emphasising peaceful integration with local Khmer and Cham, three centuries of Vietnamese history were thus extended to three or four thousand years. This was quite difficult to reconcile with the dominant narrative of a southwards march into deserted territory (P. Taylor 2001, 109). Despite such tendentious essentialisations of the Vietnamese south as embodying change and the north as representing tradition, the contested concept of regional identity tended to be resolved in favour of wider nation-building themes, such as foreign threats and “grassroots heroism” (P. Taylor 2001, 177).

The Nguyễn dynasty’s ignominious defeat by French colonialists in the mid-nineteenth century led to its loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the Vietnamese people and a need for new leaders to take on ‘the mandate of heaven’ (Mus 1973; Vu 2007, 186). French colonialism brought with it a spate of soul-searching amongst the Vietnamese, which would continue unabated until at least 1945. The ultimate success of France’s gradual incursions into Vietnam was commonly attributed to the inadequacy of the Vietnamese imperial court, its stubborn ignorance of scientific advances and its over-reliance on an ossified form of Confucian teaching. The defeat of the anti-colonialist ‘Aid the King’ (*Cần Vương*) movement in 1895 was often interpreted amongst Vietnam’s young, educated elite as conclusive proof of the anachronistic nature of Confucianism, hitherto the main source of court morality and government. Reduced to puppets of the French, subsequent

emperors lost any remaining credibility. In time, the scholar-intellectuals once deemed worthy of the highest respect became as outdated as the court they served, to be replaced by a younger generation with a new-fangled education and no socially entrenched right to be heard. Nonetheless, they raided the past for the symbolic right to influence Vietnam's future. Their one common theme was anti-colonialism and the pressing need to regain Vietnamese autonomy, if not full independence. A measure of the importance of this goal and its link to individual self-respect is evident from the 'Society of Like Hearts', active in the 1920s, which had no clear manifesto beyond independence and the restoration of Vietnamese "dignity as human beings" (Tai 1992, 64). Similarly, the ongoing Vietnamese self-strengthening movement – giving rise to organisations like the Self-Cultivation League, the Self-Perfection Society and the Self-Reliance Literary Group – points to the overlap between intellectuals' aspirations for themselves and their community.

Until the early twentieth century, Vietnamese men of learning could be more or less equated with the imperial bureaucracy. Classical Confucian scholars aspired to pass the civil examinations and become court mandarins, contenting themselves with local officialdom or a life of teaching and contemplation if they failed. When this system was discontinued in 1929, Vietnamese could, at best, hope for a minor post in the colonial administration. Vietnamese nationalist thinkers belonged primarily to the educated bourgeoisie (Tai 1992, 55). Some made their living as writers, journalists and teachers, or even professional revolutionaries as in the case of Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940). The non-professional intellectual stratum was

restricted to the few Confucian scholars who opted for passive resistance to colonialism and withdrew to their villages. Whereas those active from the turn of the twentieth century until the 1920s were schooled in the Confucian tradition, the next generation was more often a product of western education. Most were still deeply imbued with Confucian ethics, however, even if no longer capable of reading classical Chinese texts.

Vietnamese intellectuals had no wish to do away with all that was not modern. For instance, the first generation nationalists Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh (1872 – 1926) saw the nation as a stamping ground for heroic men of virtue modelled on the Confucian canon, rather than a means of mobilising the people. Tellingly, Phan Chu Trinh's account of the American revolution for an Asian audience put George Washington at the forefront of a moral struggle, with little mention of other factors (Woodside 1976, 40). Such an elitist understanding of government was difficult to reconcile with the advent of mass politics, and the neo-traditionalist tendency was largely abandoned by the next generation of Vietnamese nationalist intellectuals. Ho Chi Minh's communist-led *Viet Minh* coalition was only one of many contesting the nature of the Vietnamese nation (Tai 1992). Nguyễn An Ninh, for example, died in 1943 as one of many anti-colonialists to perish in the infamous French island prison of Poulo Condore. Greatly influenced by anarchism and Nietzsche, he promoted individual liberty and espoused the vision propounded by the French socialist Jean Jaurès of "nationalism which extends into internationalism" (Tai 1992, 83). In the event, the *Viet Minh's* combination of nationalism with the ostensible goal of worldwide proletarian

revolution helped to give them the upper hand over the likes of Nguyễn An Ninh and faction-ridden nationalist groups such as the *Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng* (Evans & Rowley 1990, 11).

The younger generation of Vietnamese nationalists often graduated from French schools, which were open only to a select and carefully controlled group destined for lowly administrative positions far below their capabilities. With only about a dozen graduating from university a year, the “French colonial presence in Vietnam insidiously undermined feelings of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-satisfaction [...] even those who did not suffer in objective terms developed a strong sense of relative deprivation” (Jamieson 1993, 97). Mired in petty officialdom, it is likely that they projected their own lack of advancement on the situation of their country and compatriots as a whole. How could Vietnamese fulfil their potential when colonial policy explicitly stated that no native, however highly qualified, should earn more than a French caretaker employed in Vietnam (Jamieson 1993, 97)? Paradoxically, it was exposure to French philosophers such as Rousseau and Montesquieu, mostly via Chinese translations, which helped sow the seeds of nationalist responses to colonialism (Bradley 2000, 12). Intellectuals attempted to recover a sense of pride through a new interpretation of Vietnamese culture. They spent a substantial proportion of their time expounding theories of resistance and renewal, using the cause of national independence as their vehicle. David Marr (1981) charts the exponential rise in book publishing and chronicles its largely nationalist themes from the later 1920s on. Significantly, biographies of national heroes made up the large

majority of publications (Whitmore 1983, 10). An estimated ninety percent of Ho Chi Minh's Youth League in 1928 came from this young intelligentsia, some of whom were being groomed to form the future communist party (Marr 1981, 374). These recruits put their modern science and ideology to the service of a historicising nationalism led by the charismatic 'Uncle Ho'. Their interpretation of the Vietnamese nation would shape official nation-building following independence.

The *Viet Minh* - headed by the last of the 'old school' Confucian scholars, Ho Chi Minh - is widely recognised to have best captured the imagination and loyalty of the people because of its active organisation of resistance and proselytisation amongst the peasantry. Its overriding goal was abundantly clear from its name, a shortened form of 'League for Vietnamese Independence'. Although officially a cross-party alliance of nationalist groups created in 1941, communists dominated the *Viet Minh* and the coalition government which took office after the revolution of August 1945. As early as 1931, Ho Chi Minh himself was criticised by Vietnamese communist cadres faithful to the Soviet Comintern for emphasising the national character of the independence struggle over its socialist goals (Turley 1980, 51). His priorities were not to change, however. Ten years later, he penned an overtly patriotic letter to the Vietnamese people, likening the national struggle ahead to Vietnam's resistance to Chinese and Mongol invasions throughout its history. In the same way as the generals who saw off these mighty foes, Ho Chi Minh himself would soon come to be revered according to the long-standing Vietnamese practice of hero worship. This cult of personality also fitted into

the almost universal Vietnamese practice of honouring dead ancestors, with Ho Chi Minh characterised as the ‘father of the nation’ (Tai 1995).

Significantly, Ho Chi Minh’s patriotic letter also referred to the Bronze Age kingdom of *Âu Lạc*, deemed an early example of Vietnamese civilisation in the Red River Delta. This was an appeal to Vietnamese patriotism without a single reference to communist principles; “Ho Chi Minh set the tone of Viet Minh propaganda by giving Vietnamese resistance to foreign aggression a timeless quality above and beyond the historical dialectic” (Marr 1981, 402).

In 1927, Ho Chi Minh published a book entitled ‘The Road to Revolution’, containing much-simplified Leninist thought in a form specially tailored to his Vietnamese recruits. He made references to French oppression as well as to moral principles familiar to every child brought up in the Confucian way (Marr 1981, 375). Military generals from the first millennium C.E., who had fought for an imperial dynasty against the Chinese and the Mongols, were anachronistically redefined as Vietnamese national liberation heroes. Traditional symbolism was thereby used to incorporate Lenin into the Vietnamese pantheon of heroes. Even Trotsky could be worshipped amongst his Vietnamese followers in accordance with this tradition (Tai 1992, 242). The adulatory funeral of the first generation nationalist Phan Chu Trinh also unleashed a wave of nationalist fervour. Regardless of ideology, these figures were all integrated into what was by then perceived as an ongoing national struggle for independence. In turn, ‘Uncle Ho’s’ carefully crafted image of accessibility, asceticism and true moral fibre enabled him to appear at once

as the modern ‘father of the nation’, a virtuous Confucian elder and a communist revolutionary.

Often pictured surrounded by children, dressed in peasant garb and smoking (his only public vice), Ho Chi Minh presented an image with which all social and educational strata could identify; he seemed the embodiment of revolutionary spirit and traditional wisdom. In a direct reference to Vietnam, the scholar of nationalism A.D. Smith (1981, 132) suggests that the “curious symbiosis of Marxist communism and nationalism” there was made possible through an alliance with the peasantry. Though Marxism was popular amongst Vietnamese intellectuals, with its promise of modernisation without imperialism, it had to percolate through a nationalist filter to be made palatable to the peasant masses. In contrast to industrial-age workers or upstart entrepreneurs, a tiny minority of Vietnam’s rural economy in any case, the peasantry had the required stamp of authenticity, an ancient ethnic cachet. By the late 1930s, the communists were becoming decidedly more nationalist than universalist, in order to dissociate themselves from the then French socialist government’s disappointing response to their demands. Ho Chi Minh understood that “selective glorification of the Vietnamese past [and] praise of particular Vietnamese customs” (Marr 1981, 416) could mobilise his compatriots more effectively than explanations of historical materialism.

The year 1935 saw the Vietnamese communists seeking to ally with Vietnamese ‘bourgeois nationalists’, in line with the Soviet Comintern policy of creating a popular front in order to achieve a two-stage revolution. These



compatriots shared a form of linguistic nationalism, which championed a romanised transcription of Vietnamese as the national script. Known as *quốc ngữ* – meaning national language – it offered an alternative to both the Chinese ideograms used at the imperial court and a Vietnamese variant of these called *nôm*. The easy-to-learn Latin alphabet was promoted to encourage literacy amongst Vietnamese speakers and a sense of shared identity, which had not been facilitated by complex ideograms accessible only to the well-educated. The French had originally thought that their own support for *quốc ngữ* would undermine the status of the traditional elite and bind the population to the colonial regime. On the contrary, literature and newspapers in *quốc ngữ* not only helped to awaken the political consciousness of the people, but also encouraged Vietnamese intellectuals to express themselves in their own idiom instead of French or Chinese. A bridge to the Vietnamese village was built; intellectuals found they could speak the language of the masses literally through *quốc ngữ* and figuratively through an ideology which portrayed traditional values and customs as the wellspring of the Vietnamese nation. Accordingly, the ‘Theses on Vietnamese Culture’ promulgated by the communist party in 1943 sought to present culture as a vital element of the revolutionary struggle against colonialism. Vietnamese culture was envisaged as “pure and beautiful”, free of superstition and corruption (Trường Chinh cited in Endres 2002, 305). Rural festivals, for instance, fell out of favour. In 1957 *Nhân Dân*, the communist party mouthpiece, called them “depraved customs” (cited in Endres 2002, 303) reminiscent of feudalism. Today, however, their official rehabilitation seems complete (Nguyễn *et al* 2003). Philip Taylor (2002) has documented a contemporary folk revival with a

nationalist gloss, officially condoning Vietnamese forms of worship in response to the last twenty years of market liberalisation and opening to the West. The VCP's nationalist discourse has thus adapted to changing times, but the core principle of prioritising the independence of a unified Vietnamese nation has never wavered.

William Duiker (1981, 5) reports Ho Chi Minh's comment that "for him, the road to communism went through nationalism", illustrating how closely the two ideologies were linked in the Vietnamese case. Today, 'Uncle Ho's' carefully constructed cult of personality as a Vietnamese father figure continues to emphasise his nationalism as much as his communist credentials. One of his most quoted phrases, emblazoned on a banner at the entrance to his mausoleum, reads 'there is nothing more precious than independence and freedom.' Ironically, the VCP's attempts at defining the national essence are not so far removed from the works of French collaborators such as Phạm Quỳnh (Tai 1992, 50), although the emphasis on Vietnam's Bronze Age origins was not current in colonial times (Pelley 1995, 234-235). Born in the 1890s and an early victim of *Viet Minh* reprisals, Phạm Quỳnh edited a newspaper intended as a mouthpiece for official French views. He believed in the inherent superiority of French culture, but nonetheless considered himself patriotic in supporting the continued presence of the French in Vietnam as a guiding hand to lift the country out of what he considered its backward state (Tai 1992, 52). Although an ardent supporter of *quốc ngữ*, his search for the national essence was not a reaffirmation of the value of village life, but rather a litany of proposals for its reform. Rather

paradoxically, however, even he believed the spirit of resistance to be central to the Vietnamese national soul (Pelley 1995, 235). The portrayal of Vietnam as a nation is thus eminently ideological, and historical interpretation plays an important part in this.

To quote a Vietnamese text dated 1906; “If there is a nation, then it must have a history” (cited in Kelley 2003, 73). Vietnamese intellectuals redefined symbols and traditions according to the new nationalist idiom which, in turn, was to be propagated through modern education. Traditional scholars were chastised for ignoring “the famous people and great events of our fatherland” (cited in Kelley 2003, 74). Chinese administrators once deemed worthy of emulation were written out of history and figures hitherto respected for their virtue were admired for their nationalism instead. This nation-building trend can be traced through the waves of anti-colonial resistance, the revolutionary rhetoric of the *Viet Minh* and the nation-building ideology of the VCP’s various incarnations. In August 1945, the *Viet Minh* helped to channel the patriotic fervour of a people galvanised by severe famine, coupled with the end of World War II and the total collapse of Japanese and French legitimacy (Marr 1981, 371). The *Viet Minh*’s rhetoric, rooted as it was in traditional Vietnamese values and cultural forms, was an important source of popularity. This interpretation of history continued to be faithfully upheld in communist party propaganda during the Vietnam-American war, which urged soldiers to go to the front safe in the knowledge that they had four thousand years of history behind them. After the fall of Saigon in April 1975, the VCP’s then general secretary echoed Ho Chi Minh’s rhetoric by evoking the Trưng sisters

and the Lady Triệu, leaders of 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century anti-Chinese insurrections respectively (Post 1989, 83).

*Viet Minh* rhetoric was a combination of appeals to traditional virtues, references to past heroes and pleas for Vietnamese solidarity in the face of foreign aggression. As a vision of mythically inspired nationalist unity transcending political divisions and internal contradictions, it was in direct contrast to French colonial accounts of Vietnam as an ethnically divided society (Pelley 1998, 376). Yet the *Viet Minh*'s emphasis on historic victories ascribed to the Vietnamese (or *Kinh*) majority was problematic in that it was unlikely to resonate with Vietnam's many ethnic minorities. Although Ho Chi Minh may have used *Kinh*-based appeals to the majority, he was nonetheless eminently pragmatic in making it as palatable as possible to the minority, however. Indeed, in 1937, before the inevitable split between Vietnamese communists and Trotskyists, the latter already felt that too much attention was being paid to ethnic issues, to the detriment of class struggle (Marr 1981, 390). Significantly, Ho sought to valorise minority cultures by recognising their languages and devoting some of his prodigious poetic output to their traditions, as well as integrating them into the party machinery (Marr 1981, 404). One important reason for including ethnic minorities in the *Viet Minh* was that it had its strongest base in northern Vietnam before the August revolution. This mountainous area, with concentrations of Thai, Hmong, Dao and other ethnicities, had a history of being more antagonistic towards the lowland Vietnamese than towards the French (Pelley 1998, 382). Similarly, contact with minorities from Vietnam's central highlands had hitherto been

limited to trade and a recognition of *Kinh* suzerainty, punctuated by regular warfare and banditry (Proschan 2003, 60). The aim of the *Viet Minh* amongst these overwhelmingly rural farming communities was to train locals to become cadres and have the ethnic *Kinh* withdraw from the villages, so that the revolution would be perceived there as truly nationwide and not dominated by the majority ethnic group.

Ho Chi Minh's approach to integrating ethnic minorities conveniently chimed with one interpretation of Vietnam's foundation myth. This tells of the hundred sons of a dragon king and a fairy queen, half of whom stayed in the flatlands and became ancestors of the *Kinh*, half of whom went to the mountains to become the forefathers of minority groups. This legend may have been manipulated for modern requirements, however. Indeed, the mountains referred to could be those of Ba Vi, lying only sixty kilometres from Hanoi and remembered as the stamping ground of the legendary Hùng kings, rather than the distant highland homelands of most ethnic minorities.

The Vietnamese nation is officially deemed to be composed of fifty-four ethnic groups, including the ethnic Vietnamese (*Kinh*), who make up around 86% of the population. Characterisations of the majority *Kinh* as the 'older brother' of other ethnic minorities testifies to a sense of kinship, albeit with a clear indication of which is the "dominant ethnics" (A.D. Smith 1995, 106) within the "Vietnamese national family" (An Thu cited in Pelley 1998, 384). Rather more neutrally, the 1992 constitution defines Vietnam as "a unified state of the ethnicities (*các dân tộc*) who live on Vietnamese territory" (cited in

Proschan 2003, 57). Nevertheless, the perception that the ethnic *Kinh* are more advanced culturally and economically, with a concomitant duty to help those 'less developed', has been a constant theme of post-colonial discourse. In 1960, for instance, then communist party secretary Lê Duẩn announced a migration programme designed to help "the ethnic minorities catch up with the *Kinh*" (Lê Duẩn, cited in Hardy 2003, 110). Current cultural policy pursues the official goal of unity in diversity (Dang 1998, 45), but persistent inequalities and a long-standing policy of migration from the overcrowded lowlands to 'new economic zones' in the highlands has fuelled ethnic tensions.

Today's official nation-building emphasises continuity and a lasting sense of Vietnamese nationhood throughout the ages, regardless of its anachronistic and exclusionary aspects. Post-colonial histories sponsored by the VCP hammered home its ideological vision of a united nation, despite centuries of autonomous rule and development in the country's south (Pelley 1995, 244; Li 1998). They underplayed the gradual southwards expansion of the Vietnamese empire from the Red River Delta, so as not to disrupt the dominant narrative thread of Vietnam as a victim and not a perpetrator of expansionism. Although this southwards movement saw the progressive subjugation of Cham and Khmer territories over a period of some five centuries, only reaching today's Ho Chi Minh City in 1674, official histories characterised Vietnam as a single, fixed bloc, with a common language, territory, economy and culture (Pelley 1995, 240). On the other hand, a great deal of ethnographic research was carried out after 1954, which seemed to support the idea of ethnic diversity. Official Vietnamese historiography was

thus decidedly schizophrenic, until a renewed focus on traditions of resistance to foreign aggression and latterly a fascination with an even more distant, Bronze Age past helped it transcend troublesome ethnic divisions and inconsistencies with a uniting narrative.

The 1955 Geneva accords marking the end of the first Indochinese War between France and Vietnam temporarily divided the territory along the seventeenth parallel, stipulating that elections should be held within two years across the whole country. A Vietnamese present at the negotiations remarked ominously; “The competition begins between the South and the North” (Tran Van Do, cited in Catton 2002, 26). Indeed, Ngô Đình Diệm, who in 1955 took over as leader of the newly proclaimed southern Republic of Vietnam (RVN) from the discredited Nguyễn emperor Bảo Đại, was constantly competing economically and ideologically with the DRV to be recognised as the legitimate leader of an ‘unnaturally’ divided Vietnam. Diệm’s delegation had not signed the Geneva accords, something which was later presented in RVN propaganda as a patriotic protest against the “amputation of the national territory” (cited in Masur 2004, 158). Literature circulating in the RVN echoed this sentiment, suggesting that the notion of a single Vietnamese ‘geo-body’ was accepted beyond official circles; “Fold up all the maps. Everything that bears any trace of the concept of division, I want to cast it all away” (Thao Truong, cited in Jamieson 1993, 285). Yet the same idea of national unity was being propagated in the DRV. Jamieson (1993, 273) also cites a propaganda poem by Truong Lu; “O southern region of a thousand memories and a million affections/ Flesh of our flesh, blood of our blood/ The flesh cannot be torn

asunder/ And your blood is still mingled with ours". In the RVN, its position was officially contrasted to the DRV's alleged abdication of sovereignty to Chinese and Soviet communism, its disavowal of national heroes and its neglect of the Vietnamese arts. In Diệm's own words, "nationalism which allies itself with communism is bound to end up in treason" (cited in Catton 2002, 37). Diệm's regime officially portrayed itself as battling "Communism, Underdevelopment, and Disunity" (cited in Catton 2002, 37). Disunity, understood as both ideological and territorial, was attributed to colonial partition and underdevelopment. Anti-communism, in turn, was supplemented by the rather vague and opaque doctrine of personalism, which Diệm sought to reconcile with Asian traditions such as Confucianism. At the same time, however, the VCP was preparing to "liberate the South and to unify the country" (Khoi 2001, 66).

Ngô Đình Diệm's regime pursued the most developed nation-building programme during the short life of the RVN. Diệm set about establishing his legitimacy as president of a "Diệmocracy", which placed more emphasis on the role of an enlightened sovereign than free elections, parliamentary debate or the like (Masur 2004, 33). By denouncing the DRV as incompatible with Vietnamese tradition and under the thumb of a foreign ideology, Diệm was staking the RVN's own claim to be the only legitimate successor to Vietnam's history of resistance and cultural sophistication (Catton 2002, 27). For instance, Diệm declared a national holiday to remember the Hùng kings, thus seeking to burnish his own, young regime with the patina of an ancient, Red River civilisation. He sought to overcome the lack of territorial continuity



between the Red River Delta and the RVN by building up the central Vietnamese city of Huế as a centre of traditional learning and culture to rival Hanoi. Situated close to the demarcation line between the DRV and the RVN, Huế's newly-founded university and restored national monuments were meant to function as a beacon of 'true' Vietnamese culture and values that would radiate north. In accordance with this aim, the Nguyễn dynasty's role in facilitating colonial encroachment and their citadel's similarity to Beijing's forbidden city were omitted from official publications, which carefully distinguished Vietnamese culture from Chinese forms and antecedents (Masur 2004, 144).

Diệm was well aware of the ambivalence of his own reliance on U.S. support and the difficulty of reconciling this with his self-conscious patriotism (Catton 2002, 25), but also realised the need for economic development to foster legitimacy. Convinced of the importance of winning 'hearts and minds', he pursued various nation-building policies through propaganda campaigns, film and radio broadcasting, education drives and a range of printed media, before being ousted in 1963. Key themes included the vilification of the communist 'Other' and the idea of self-sacrifice, which he claimed to embody in an attempted cult of personality that could do little to compete with 'Uncle Ho' (Catton 2002, 35). Nevertheless, Diệm purported to represent the true Vietnamese nation, declaring in 1956 that his aim was to "unify our ravaged fatherland" (cited in Masur 2004, 45) despite his refusal to contest elections.

Diệm also had recourse to familiar themes of historical heroism to bolster his rule. For instance, the introduction of another national holiday honouring the Trưng sisters emphasised their non-imperial, mandarin status – similar to Diệm’s own – as evidence of their closeness to the people (Masur 2004, 107). In 1961 Madame Nhu, Diệm’s notorious sister-in-law, inaugurated a statue in honour of the two heroines with a speech linking them to the people of the RVN as “their proud descendants” (cited in Masur 2004, 201; Catton 2002, 17), thus positing a direct genealogical link between them and a putative Vietnamese nation. Populism, patriotism and personality cult were thus combined in Diệm’s official nation-building ideology, and there is evidence that some southern Vietnamese did indeed regard him as a patriot (P. Taylor 2001, 186). At the same time as wanting to preserve the best of Vietnamese tradition, however, Diệm was keen to modernise the country, just like those progressive, early twentieth century nationalists who advocated reform (Catton 2002, 36).

U.S. propaganda, which was disseminated in parallel to Diệm’s, echoed his anti-communist message, but found it increasingly difficult to justify the regime’s failure to raise living standards. It shifted from emphasising Diệm’s alleged achievements to showcasing American culture, values and its so-called “people’s capitalism” (Masur 2004, 87), through everything from sumptuous urban cultural centres to provincial theatre performances. This promotion of democracy, coupled with the consumer goods flooding the Vietnamese south under U.S. aid programmes, served to cast Diệm’s own rigged elections and his autocratic, unpopular policies in an even worse light.

Neither was Diệm keen to fuel accusations of being America's 'lackey' or 'puppet' – a constant feature of VCP propaganda – amongst RVN citizens (Catton 2002, 28). The escalating demands of war meant that Diệm's successor, Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, never developed an elaborate nation-building strategy, and his tenure was more about monopolising power than attempting to legitimate it (Beresford 1989, 54; Morris 1973, 144). Meanwhile, the communist regime which Diệm portrayed as having capitulated ideologically to the Chinese enemy was busy moulding its own nation-building project using much the same legitimating myths, but casting itself as the latest exponent of a long history of Vietnamese resistance. Some outside observers also espoused the view that Vietnam was an ancient nation.

For theorists of nationalism, the Vietnamese case provides some support for the ethno-symbolist claim that a pre-modern sense of ancestry and identity forms the basis of modern nationalism (Smith 1986). Impressive archaeological finds, including pediform axe heads, burial goods and large, richly decorated drums, offer ample evidence of a sophisticated Bronze Age culture in northern Vietnam's Red River Delta. Linguists have found evidence of phonetically similar words meaning 'people' and by extension 'nation', amongst those living between the Yangtze and the Mekong rivers (Taylor 1983, 3). Today, the Vietnamese nation is officially portrayed as having pre-existed Chinese conquest in the first millennium C.E. and emerged with its cultural identity intact. Developed by the Vietnamese government's Institute of History in the 1950s and 1960s (Pelley 1995, 233), this interpretation is a

conscious contradiction of French colonial theories characterising Vietnam as a withered offshoot of Chinese civilisation.

The VCP continues to use the idea of national *longue durée* to bolster its own legitimacy as leader and guardian of the nation. For instance, a poster commemorating the party's fifty year jubilee adapted the familiar image of the Bronze Age drums by replacing their characteristic bird and boatmen motifs with factories and silos, setting a hammer and sickle squarely in the centre (Loofs-Wissowa 1991, 48). The drums also figure prominently in museums, shrines to Ho Chi Minh, and even the Vietnamese version of the 'Wheel of Fortune' television game show. This primordialist perspective is shared by a number of Western scholars, a trend Tuong Vu (2007, 189) associates with the radicalisation of many academics in opposition to the Vietnam-American war. Keith Taylor's (1983) survey of early Vietnamese history is one of the most authoritative English-language statements of this position, although he subsequently sought to qualify it (Taylor 1998). Evans and Rowley (1984, 10) refer to "that loose sense of national identity that could be termed 'proto-nationalism'". William Duiker (2000, 11) writes of a "tenacious sense of [...] national identity" born of resistance to Chinese rule. Alexander Woodside (1976, 30) uses the term "national spirit" and Ken Post (1989, 86) asserts that by the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Vietnamese "had become a unified people conscious of themselves as such and with a pantheon of heroes and heroines". Citing territory, history, economy and language as unifying factors, Post (1989, 83) argues that the Vietnamese never forgot their independent existence before the millennium of Chinese rule (179 B.C.E. – 938 C.E.) and upheld customs

such as tattooing, teeth-blackening and betel nut chewing despite Chinese attempts to eradicate these. The fact that the Vietnamese took on many aspects of Chinese civilisation *after* independence, such as a legal code in 1042 and the Confucian examination system in 1075, is interpreted as a sign of level-headed recognition of progressive reforms rather than evidence of cultural assimilation. Current school history textbooks, the contents of which are state controlled, present much the same view (Nguyễn *et al* 2006a, 18). Finally, several Vietnamese scholars (Pham *et al* 2001, 15; Dang 1998, 48) are of the opinion that Vietnamese nationalism's emphasis on the family, the community and villages centred around a tutelary spirit should not be equated with Western ideological forms. In line with ethno-symbolist scholars, however (A. D. Smith 1995, 57), they identify a myth of common origin as crucial to the sense of Vietnamese nationhood.

On the other hand, the argument that nationalism is a product of modern circumstance also has much to commend it in the Vietnamese case (Vu 2007, 180). Liam Kelley (2003) has demonstrated how second millennium understandings of the Vietnamese realm as a “domain of manifest civility” were premised on a completely different world view to that of nation-states. This status was measured in literary output and records accessible only to the educated elite. It contrasts with early twentieth century nationalism, which spread quickly to the masses, partly due to the popularisation of romanised script (*quốc ngữ*) that was relatively easy to master (Anderson 1991, 126). Although much Vietnamese tradition is rooted in village life, it is questionable whether this can be equated with national loyalties. Indeed, the VCP itself was

undecided as to the limits of the Vietnamese nation right up until the 1940s (Goscha 1995). Nevertheless, the mobilising force of the nation has been exploited by Vietnamese leaders ever since and remains fundamental to the VCP's legitimacy. Contemporary nation-building emphasises unity despite significant regional disparities and historical cleavages within the Vietnamese nation-state. The most common broad distinction made by Vietnamese today is between northern, central and southern Vietnam, respectively centred around the cities of Hanoi, Huế and Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). Attachments to home provinces tend to be strong too, and informal support networks amongst internal migrants are arranged accordingly. There is also a very structured recognition of ethnic minorities within Vietnam. Institutions such as Hanoi's Museum of Ethnology and the Institute of History (Pelley 1995: 233) continue to document cultural difference within government-defined boundaries, and the country's multiethnic character is enshrined in its constitution. Vietnam does not pursue a policy of multiculturalism, however, if we take this term to mean the acceptance and incorporation of "claims made by minority constituencies for inclusion and cultural recognition" (Kostakopoulou 2006, 85). This is in large part because of multiculturalism's perceived incompatibility with national unity (Stratton & Ang 1994), which is at the core of VCP nation-building.

In Vietnam, the ethnic Vietnamese are variously described as the 'elder brother' of minority groups or the "nucleus" of Vietnamese culture (Mai Quang, cited in Evans 1985, 125). A parallel can be drawn with the German term *Leitkultur*, or guiding culture, reputedly coined in 2000 by the Christian

Democrat politician Friedrich Merz (Green 2004, 119). The concept has periodically resurfaced in political discourse since then. Its exact meaning remains contested, ranging from recognition of the values contained in Germany's Basic Law to advanced cultural and linguistic competence in all things German (Klusmeyer 2001). Left-leaning politicians tend to condemn its exclusivity, only to be criticised by their opponents for offering an allegedly wishy-washy multicultural alternative (hence the pejorative use of the term *Multikulti*). Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that nation-building in both Germany and Vietnam "entails both a more conscious attempt to embrace the civic ideal and simultaneously insists on the national state being underpinned by the culture and traditions of its dominant or core *ethnie*," understood as an ethnic group (A.D. Smith 1995, 106). As will be documented in the following chapters, this is evident from the prominence given to ethnic Vietnamese and, to a lesser extent, German cultural symbols as representative of the whole nation.

## **II German nation-building**

Germany is often cited as the archetypal example of an ethnic *Volksnation* or *Kulturnation*, as envisaged by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century romantic movement. Its regional identities and political antecedents as a disparate collection of sovereign states within the Holy Roman Empire are just as important to understanding contemporary German federalism and nation-building, however. The nineteenth century Prussian chancellor Bismarck was key to engineering the unification of the kingdoms of Bavaria, Prussia and

tens of other dukedoms and principalities in 1871, including Alsace and Lorraine newly wrested from France. Prussian territories then covered great swathes of modern Poland, stretching as far as the city of Königsberg, today's Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. Romantic nationalist thinking, itself wide-ranging and relatively marginal in political terms, cannot be taken as indicative of the prevailing nineteenth century sentiment; "When Gottlieb Fichte, Heinrich Heine, Leopold von Ranke, or Richard Wagner engaged the question 'What is German?' after all, their contributions described an ambition, rather than a state of affairs" (Gregor *et al* 2006, 3).

The concept of *Kultur* was itself contested, having associations with everything from high culture, through folklore and class, to religious confession (H. W. Smith 1995, 21). Indeed, the only thing uniting the former states of the Holy Roman Empire after its dissolution in 1806 was opposition to Napoleonic rule, which could mobilise a broad cross-section of society against the enemy 'Other'. Matthew Levinger (2000) shows how Prussian bureaucrats sought to exploit this inchoate nationalist sentiment to underpin their emperor's rule, whilst remaining remarkably ambiguous about the Prussian or German nature of their appeals. Aristocrats, romantics and republicans all sought to mould the national idea to fit their interests, emphasising its cultural, territorial, conservative or revolutionary potential accordingly. What each had in common, however, was the overriding concept of national unity, understood as "an ideally harmonious political community possessing a unitary interest and a unitary will" (Levinger 2000, 48). This construct was by no means a foregone conclusion. A range of alternative



political set-ups were thinkable (Levinger 2000, 239) and societal divisions continued to run deep beneath the ideal type of the unified nation. As such, different understandings of what constituted national culture and identity “divided as much as it unified society” (H. W. Smith 1995, 233). For instance, many forms of romantic nationalism included a strong Protestant and anti-Semitic component which only compounded existing confessional differences. Religion was also central to the heated debates surrounding *kleindeutsch* – and hence predominantly Protestant - German unification, as opposed to the *grossdeutsche Lösung* including Catholic Austria (Levinger 2000, 223).

Regional loyalties added to the essentially contested concept of the German nation throughout the nineteenth century. The states of Saxony, Hannover and Württemberg, for instance, sought to foster patriotism towards them as ‘Fatherlands’ (Green 2001). Attempts to legitimate their small-scale monarchies through festivals, museums and history textbooks, among other means, much resembled nation-building in today’s Germany and Vietnam. Yet they were not deemed incompatible with a larger-scale loyalty to an overarching, but as yet ill-defined, German nation. Although the impact of these policies is hard to measure, they seemed to have had some success in combination with local loyalty to one’s *Heimat*, or homeland (Sutherland 2001). Writing about his early-twentieth century childhood, for instance, former West German chancellor Kurt Kiesinger reminisced; “[W]e not only were citizens of the German Reich, but also, and foremost, good citizens of Württemberg” (cited in Weber & Kowert 2007, 70). Affiliations to *Länder*, or federal states, thus shaped some German leaders’ post-war thinking.

Born into a devout Catholic background in the Rhineland, then West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer said in 1946; “[N]ationalism has experienced the strongest intellectual resistance in those catholic and protestant parts of Germany that least fell for the teachings of Karl Marx” (cited in Weber & Kowert 2007, 47). He thereby distanced himself at once from socialism and Prussian, state-led nationalism, to which he felt the Rhineland had never really subscribed. Concepts such as *Heimat* thus served as a stepping stone, rather than a hurdle, to fostering emotional attachment to the wider nation (Eley 2006; Applegate 1990; Confino 1997). Alon Confino charts how the definition of the term *Heimat* was gradually widened between 1871 and 1914 to mean not only the locality, but also the nation, until the concept of *deutsche Heimat* became corrupted by Nazi ideology. However, Celia Applegate points out that it was “pulled out of the rubble of the Nazi *Reich* as a victim, not a perpetrator” and came to embody once more the local patriotism which had been discouraged by Nazism (Applegate 1990, 228). The *Heimat* became a vehicle for “speaking the unspeakable” horror of the Third Reich in order to transcend it (Applegate 1990, 228).

It has been argued that in West Germany, identification with post-war economic reconstruction made a virtue out of necessity (Giesen 2001). Emphasis on traits such as industriousness, reliability, and efficiency helped to fill the gaping void left by the collapse of Nazism, and could include immigrants, at least in principle. Giesen (2001, 49) also points to a rejection of both ethnic and *petit bourgeois* interpretations of German identity among

some sections of society. This attitude was typified in the student protests of 1968, which railed against materialism, bureaucracy and German society's perceived reluctance to come to terms with Nazism. The anti-establishment movement particularly deplored what it saw as the continuing government authoritarianism embodied in proposed emergency laws. Chancellor Willy Brandt, elected in 1969, accordingly proposed to 'dare more democracy.' In terms of identity politics, there was a concerted attempt to engage in *Vergangensheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the Nazi past, through heated media debates and a strong emphasis on the Third Reich in school history lessons. An internationalist identity also came to prominence in 1968, espoused by many who felt alienated from a Germany they associated with ossified conservatism (Davies 2007).

The shadow of the Iron Curtain loomed so large over West Germany's nation-building that it completely blocked out the issue of economic migrants. The West German constitution, known as the Basic Law, bestowed automatic citizenship on all ethnic Germans living in Eastern bloc countries, including the GDR. Having thus taken on constitutional responsibility for millions of potential German arrivals, successive West German governments were reluctant to include the tens of thousands of labour migrants, tellingly called *Gastarbeiter* or guest workers, who were actually settling: "The very existence of East Germany made a redefinition of German citizenship [...] difficult, as this would *ipso facto* dilute the pan-German definition taken over by West Germany" (Green 2004, 39). When the Iron Curtain disappeared and that putative pan-German state was realised, the pressing issue of ethnic

Germans who began arriving in droves once again pushed non-German immigration to the bottom of the agenda. Following the 1998 federal election, Gerhard Schröder's coalition government promised a debate which historical circumstance had hindered thus far. Its result, the nationality law of 2000, rejected the principle of life-long dual nationality and the possibly divided loyalties it entailed. As a direct result of vocal party and public opposition (Holmes Cooper 2002), citizenship for German-born children of foreigners was not an automatic right. It had to be sealed by a positive recognition of German belonging and repudiation of any other nationality by the age of twenty-three. The latest piece of legislation in this field is the 2005 immigration law. Among other measures, this ties the naturalisation process to several years' residence and the completion of a course in German language and civic culture. This can be interpreted as an attempt to inculcate basic principles of German *Leitkultur* in would-be citizens, as studies show these tests to be less about communicative competence or general knowledge and more about subjective impressions of how an individual 'fits in' to German society. Ingrid Piller (2001, 270) points out that the German Interior Ministry's naturalisation criteria emphasise the applicant's ability to understand (passively), thus privileging a perspective whereby the applicant is expected to assimilate both literally (the text) and figuratively (Germanness) rather than play an active role in an intercultural conversation. This supports the view that German nation-building continues to be organised around the model of a dominant *ethnie* rather than multiculturalism.

In contrast to the FRG, the official identity of the former GDR was premised on anti-fascism from the outset. Any East German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was thus out of the question, as it was assumed that the entire East German population had been opposed to fascism. Another strand in GDR nation-building was internationalism. This included giving political asylum to like-minded 'fighters against imperialism' fleeing dictatorships in Spain, Greece, Chile and elsewhere (Poutrus 2005, 120). Official events marking international worker solidarity were not necessarily reflected in everyday life, however (Kolinsky 2004). For example, the lives of foreigners working and studying in the GDR were strictly controlled and they were largely segregated from the German population in separate housing blocks. Workers contracted from Vietnam, Cuba, Mozambique and elsewhere as factory labour were not encouraged to learn German or to integrate. The internationalist strand in government nation-building did not translate into the promotion of an inclusive self-understanding (Kolinsky 2004).

The Cold War erected major barriers to imagining a German national identity not rooted in ethnicity. Despite Germany's division into two states, both East (until 1974) and West German governments maintained that it continued to be a single nation. Ultimately, the popular expression of this aspiration was decisive in bringing about a unitary state, if not a nation. '*Wir sind ein Volk*' (we are one people) soon supplanted '*Wir sind das Volk*' (we are the people) as the chant adopted by East Germans demonstrating for greater political freedom in the autumn of 1989. Today, "the peculiarity of an incomplete, vicarious nation-state for all Germans in the communist diaspora

is no more” (Joppke 1999, 95). Unification, coupled with the pressures of ethnic Germans (*Aussiedler*) and asylum seekers arriving in large numbers, led to a pragmatic policy shift requiring changes to united Germany’s Basic Law. It is now politically possible to go about redefining German identity, and the incremental steps taken towards reforming citizenship law testify to this. However, sustained opposition to reform suggests that political culture is not in step with legislation, and that the idea of Germany as a country of immigration, let alone a multicultural melting pot, has yet to make much headway (Dennis & Kolinsky 2004). In 2004, then German chancellor Gerhard Schröder interpreted his invitation to attend commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the D-Day landings as showing that “the post-war period is over and done for good” (Reuters 2004). Nevertheless, Germans continue to deliberate over their relationship to the past and its implications for national identity, patriotism and pride (Green *et al* 2008, 19; Roberts 2000, 181). Almost twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the legacy of the GDR also continues to be the subject of public debate. In looking at how the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) finds its expression in unified Germany, there are indications that contemporary nation-building ideology has not incorporated four decades of separate GDR statehood as an equally constituent part of national identity.

Evidence suggests that some East Germans do not identify strongly with their current status as German citizens, due to the dominance of West German norms, institutions and values in public discourse since reunification (Schneider 2004, 171). Certain felt the speed of reunification cheated them of

the chance to preserve what they considered positive aspects of GDR society (Roberts 2000, 185). Despite the fact that a former GDR citizen, Angela Merkel, became German chancellor in 2005 (Berg 2005), differences in self-understanding persist between east and west, including class ascription, forms of communication and attitudes towards the state. This can be partly attributed to the GDR's role in socialising its citizens (Ahbe 2004, 113). At the local level, for instance, this continued differentiation can be observed in former East and West Berliners' choice of newspapers, parliamentary representation and figures of speech (Schneider 2004, 178). One popular expression of difference has filtered into mainstream culture as *Ostalgie*, or nostalgia for the east, reaching a mass audience through popular films such as *Goodbye, Lenin*, the relaunch of East German products like *Nudossi* chocolate spread and the commercialisation of the distinctive figure at former GDR pedestrian crossings, known as the *Ampelmännchen*. The release of widely acclaimed feature films like *Das Leben der Anderen* (The Lives of Others), coupled with periodic revelations from East Germany's secret police files, also ensure that their activities remain in the public eye. The GDR museum, which opened in Berlin in 2006 as a private, commercial venture, has been criticised for riding this wave of *Ostalgie*. A spokesman for the German Historical Museum (*Deutsches Historisches Museum – DHM*) attacked its narrow focus on consumer goods, its over-emphasis on daily life and its lack of context (Stone 2006), something which he claimed the two thousand year span of his museum could provide. At the same time, the banalisation or even glamorisation of East German life can be interpreted as undermining narratives of continuous German unity (Cooke 2005) and thus

threatening the ideological premise of the DHM as representing two millennia of continuous German history. Yet an overarching sense of belonging must also have oiled the wheels of rapid German reunification. The so-called 'chancellor of unity' Helmut Kohl and his Christian Democrat party returned to the idea of a shared German *Kultur* in order to underline continuity despite partition (Fulbrook 1994, 213). However, the notion of a common German culture and sense of belonging remains as contested today as in its nineteenth century usages. Indeed, unified Germany has been said to display "three kinds of linked consciousness: a post-communist kind for the eastern *Länder*, a somewhat bewildered move to a unified national consciousness 50 years after World War Two; and the reach for a speculative 'European' consciousness" (Wood 1998, 10).

The impact of the Third Reich on Germany's sense of national identity is well documented, but the effect of the GDR past on national unity and memory is just as important. The abbreviation GDR was specifically used and encouraged by its government in order to avoid associations with both Germany's pre-war history and West Germany, its constant rival. East Germany's ruling party, the SED, upheld the notion of national unity in the 1950s and '60s, however, before experimenting with an ill-fated form of 'socialist nationalism'. As in Vietnam, the SED commissioned an official history in order to help legitimise itself as the latest embodiment of Germany's putatively socialist character. This was complemented by the promotion of communist role models such as Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxembourg, but also cultural figures like Bach, Beethoven and Goethe, as well as the



renovation of Berlin's traditional architecture (Nothnagle 1999). Yet an explicitly East German citizenship was created in the late 1960s and the goal of German reunification excised from the GDR's 1974 constitution, whereas West Germany remained wedded to the idea of a pan-German nation throughout its existence.

The ideological manipulation of the nation is particularly clear cut in the GDR case, since the SED sought to foster a national consciousness as a crucial boost to its legitimacy. In 1954, its then general secretary Walter Ulbricht used typically nationalist language at the fourth SED congress; "We want German unity because the Germans in the western part of our homeland are our brothers, because we love our fatherland, because we know that the restoration of German unity is an unavoidable aspect of the logic of history" (cited in McKay 1998, 15). To this extent, it is remarkably similar to a speech made a year earlier by then West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer on a visit to the United States; "[R]eunification shall be achieved only in peace and freedom. We, in the West of Germany, will not submit to the Soviet yoke in order to reunite with our brethren in the East as a Russian satellite state. We shall not do so because we would thereby betray our compatriots in the East who expect us to maintain our freedom so that they, too, can share it one day again" (cited in Weber & Kowert 2007, 63). Ulbricht, however, understood national unity in terms of working class solidarity. He assumed that class could undermine nation, and aimed to extend the socialist system to West Germany. Adenauer, on the other hand, would only countenance a 'free' Germany. Since they did not consider reunification without either socialist

revolution or democracy a worthy goal, both subordinated nationalism to their respective ideologies. Each nonetheless upheld the ultimate aim of unity, despite the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The SED soon found it increasingly difficult to square this with its promotion of a 'socialist national consciousness' specific to East Germany, however (Meuschel 1992, 291). The renaming of institutions without the word 'German', for instance, remained patchy and confusing, indicating inconsistencies in the SED's message, which would dog its attempts to influence GDR citizens' understanding of nationhood.

In 1969, then West German chancellor Willy Brandt's formulation of 'two states in one nation' contrasted with Walter Ulbricht's emphasis on state sovereignty over national unity. Brandt understood the nation as a combination of historical reality and political will, which went beyond a common language and culture to encompass a shared feeling of belonging (Meuschel 1992, 276). Despite his diplomatic overtures to the East, known as *Ostpolitik*, Brandt's assertion of ongoing national unity served to justify the FRG's continued refusal to recognise the GDR as a sovereign state. Conversely, Ulbricht's decision to abandon his earlier claim of German unity in 1970 had a lot to do with his increasingly precarious position as leader, differences with the Soviet Union, and retaliation at Brandt's use of the unity concept to thwart GDR ambitions to join the United Nations. Ulbricht began to question the unity of German culture and language, which he considered Americanised in the FRG, "contaminated by imperialism and manipulated by capitalism" (cited in McKay 1998, 55). This position continued under his

successor, Erich Honecker, who oversaw a hardening of the SED's stance towards the FRG as a 'foreign country' in the early 1970s. This was another confusing reversal which flowed from a policy of *Abgrenzung*, meaning demarcation or separation (Ludz 1977, 222). The SED's pursuit of external state sovereignty had entailed a repudiation of the German nation, although survey evidence at the time suggested that East Germans were able to distinguish between state and nation, and even see the GDR as their 'fatherland' without prejudice to accepting the continued existence of a historic and cultural German nation (McKay 1998, 92). These differences between popular understanding and ideological manipulation exemplify Karl Mannheim's (1991 [1929], 49) distinction between total and particular national ideologies.

The GDR's 1974 constitution replaced references to the German nation and national unity with an emphasis on the socialist character of the state (Ludz 1977, 223). Tellingly, in 1970, Brezhnev had summed up the German question as follows; " [N]ever forget that without us, the Soviet Union, with our power and strength, the GDR would not exist [...] Germany does not exist anymore and it is better that way. There is the socialist GDR and the imperialist FRG" (cited in McKay 1998, 57). The SED did try to replace an ethnically and historically grounded conception of Germanness with a 'socialist national consciousness', albeit one which appropriated suitable German historical figures. The official introduction of a distinction between the concepts of 'nation' and 'nationality' in late 1974 came as a belated theoretical justification for the glaring contradictions and inconsistencies in this policy

(Meuschel 1992, 281). A 1975 article in the party organ, *Neues Deutschland* (the name of which was never 'degermanised') explained that the "complexity of ethnic characteristics, traits and features of a population is described as 'nationality'. Therefore the concept of nationality is narrower than the concept of the nation, and what is more, not the most decisive" (cited in McKay 1998, 109). Despite this nice academic distinction, which rescued German history and culture whilst subordinating them to the overriding strength of socialist principles, the SED's nation-building ideology suffered from being too obviously instrumental, top-down and authoritarian. This is in contrast to the gradual socialisation and lived experience of former GDR citizens, which continue to influence their identities and personal ideologies to this day.

German reunification was a unique event; never before had two developed welfare states been brought together so quickly or comprehensively (Lehmbruch 1993, 32). The chosen method was accession under Article 23 of West Germany's Basic Law. A preliminary treaty between the two states in May 1990 preceded unification on October 3<sup>rd</sup> of the same year. Originally conceived as a caretaker document in 1949, the Basic Law would actually become the constitution of the united German state almost overnight, leaving East Germans to grapple with their new status as citizens of a united Germany. The hurdles to be overcome in the eleven months between the fall of the Berlin wall and unification were enormous. This process was legitimated by the GDR's first and only free elections of March 1990, in which the conservative Alliance for Democracy's majority was interpreted as an endorsement of Helmut Kohl's quick reunification policy

(Lehmbruch 1993, 26). Expectations in the East were high. Even if standards of living were relatively good there compared to other Eastern bloc countries, they could not compete with the images of West German affluence reaching GDR television sets, and the SED regime continually measured itself both practically and ideologically against its neighbour. There would inevitably be disappointment. As soon as the wall came down, East Germans faced huge challenges, including the revision of rents, the introduction of the West German pension and benefit system, the fear that their homes might be repossessed by pre-war landowners, and unemployment (Kolinsky 1995). These changes caused untold mental strain. The status of pensioners, single parents, women, young people and the relatively privileged was turned upside down as the existing social system disappeared. For instance, the overwhelming majority of East Germans were accustomed to a way of life which revolved around their *Betrieb*, or workplace (Kolinsky 1995, 22). Yet every second family in the Leipzig area is estimated to have experienced the economic, social and psychological consequences of unemployment in the five years following unification (Kolinsky 1995, 71).

Although the influence of SED ideology on its former citizens is an important feature of East German socialisation, this must be distinguished from the regime's total ideology. Wolf Biermann, a famous East German poet and singer-songwriter who fell foul of the authorities there and was expelled in 1976, describes the sense of alienation and difference he felt living in West Germany; "I came from Germany to Germany, I could speak the language but didn't understand a word. Why? Because the system of cultural and political

references in which I found myself was so different to the one I knew. I felt as though I was in a foreign land” (*Spiegel* 2006b).<sup>i</sup> Biermann did not regard West Germany as a foreign land until he experienced it as such, since he spoke German and enjoyed West German citizenship by virtue of Article 116 of the Basic Law. He claims that he would rather have been exiled to Poland or the Soviet Union, because they had the same “social structure” as the GDR (*Spiegel* 2006b). This underlines how deeply the GDR regime, modelled on the Soviet system, had affected Biermann’s ability to relate to his fellow Germans across the border and live a normal life there. It also gives a sense of the disorientation felt in 1989 by East Germans, who even struggled with everyday tasks like grocery shopping due to the glut of unfamiliar products which suddenly became available (Confino & Fritzsche 2002). Despite failing in its state legitimating function, at least one analyst concludes that GDR ideology left behind;

[A] distinctive outlook on life, an unmistakably East German use of language, a vast constellation of shattered dreams and hurt feelings, a widespread distrust of ‘Western’ values, a general inability to look critically at the recent past and at one’s own role in it, a unique setting of priorities molded by forty years of life in a socialist society and unrelenting assaults by the SED’s myth-building machine. For better or worse, the new united Germany now lives with this legacy (Nothnagle 1999, 38).

The idea of a single German nation, as enshrined in the Basic Law, West German citizenship legislation, and East German demonstrators’ chants

of 'We are one people' (*Wir sind ein Volk*) in 1989, did not correspond to lived experience before and after unification. In his unique anthropological study of East and West Berlin before 1989, John Borneman (1992, 22) refers to the building of the wall in 1961 as "a realization of what already had been a divided community in the political imagination of the residents". That is, the creation of a physical barrier entrenched already established and diverging nation-building projects premised on communism and capitalism, Soviet and Western alliances respectively. When the wall crumbled, so did the apparatus of state security, national myth-making and self-censorship which had characterised the GDR regime. In its place came a rapid and wholesale adoption of the West German model (McKay 1998, 157). Despite initial euphoria, however, this did not and could not erase GDR citizens' completely different socialisation, leading to a gap between the official ideological basis of the new 'Berlin republic' and their own 'particular' ideological identification with the united German nation.

In the first pan-German election of 1990, the Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands – SPD*) candidate, Oskar Lafontaine, was embarrassed by the national question, leaving it up to the incumbent Christian Democrats to shape the new national discourse (Berger 1994, 59). Chancellor Helmut Kohl represented the nation in terms of a prosperous political order modelled on West Germany and anchored within the EU, but open to all German *Landsleute*, or fellow countrymen (Borneman 1992, 318). This reassuring reference to compatriots was vague and inclusive enough for East and West Germans alike to conjure up their own mental

images of where and to what they belonged. Yet one factor indicating disillusionment with post-unification life is a resurgence in Eastern support for the Party of Democratic Socialism (*Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* – PDS), the SED's successor, which merged with another left-wing group to form *Die Linke* in 2007.

With reference to the GDR, the former PDS leader Gabrielle Zimmer contrasted the difficulties those born in the 1940s and growing up under Stalinist influence had with nationhood to those of her later generation, who identified with the GDR in a less ideological, politicised way and found the idea of national belonging and pride less problematic; “[I]t is a question of seeking an identity in place rather than ideology. Paradoxically, the collapse of Stalinism as an ideology has emptied the GDR of its political content and left a shell of memories of *Heimat*, order and stability” (Thompson 2002, 125). Members of Zimmer's GDR generation were also less ambivalent about national identity than those of their West German counterparts who participated in the youth movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Brunssen 2002, 21). Nonetheless, embracing post-unity German identity was far from straightforward for Gabrielle Zimmer or other Eastern Germans, regardless of their political persuasion. Some rekindled regional loyalties to the likes of Saxony (Szejnmann 2002). Others, ironically, regarded the GDR as a “retrospectively imagined community” (Thompson 2002, 128), one which forty years of SED propaganda could not impose but which former citizens adopted in hindsight. To them it represented the sense of community and stability which they yearned for when confronted with the hectic and confusing pace of



capitalism and globalisation in united Germany. This was emphatically not a hankering after past authoritarianism and, to the extent that it was political at all, represented more of a negative reaction to neo-liberalism.

Distinguishing politicisation from socialisation in this way was not difficult for former GDR citizens who had grown used to separating ideological allegiance to the SED's 'socialist nationalist consciousness' from everyday life and loyalties (Cooke 2005, 7). However, it was precisely a perceived inability in post-unification discourse to deal with the GDR in a nuanced and differentiated way which rankled with many. Their experience of 'everyday socialism' seemed to set them apart from their Western German counterparts, though a parallel could be drawn with the consciously depoliticised nature of post-war West German identity; "If the West Germans had the economic miracle and a form of patriotism rooted in the strength of the German mark as a substitute identity then the East Germans had their antiquarian so-called niche existence. What both had in common was a propensity not to examine the underlying geo-strategic and historical conditions" (Thompson 2002, 131). Despite its origins as the successor party to the SED, the PDS is just as much about capturing those voters who identify with 'everyday socialism' as those who espouse the ideology itself, hence its own use of the term *Heimat* in party materials to evoke a sense of familiarity and belonging to a retrospectively imagined community (Hough 2005).

Mary Fulbrook (2001) discusses "the creation of two German societies" between 1945 and 1990, an observation which in itself chips away at the

notion of ongoing national unity; “Ultimately, a common language, a common heritage, and a residual sense of common national identity, were fractured by deep-rooted and extensive differences in the very constitution of social classes, life chances, cultural attitudes and patterns of behaviour” (Fulbrook 2001, 245). At the same time, it could be argued that unification was in some ways constitutive of an *ex post facto* GDR identity, as former citizens were confronted with contrasting East and West German socialisation (Cooke 2005, 7). Both conclusions do much to undermine the myth of German unity on which the taken for granted term ‘reunification’ is premised. Furthermore, the nature of this narrative, laden in favour of both Western capitalist norms and an ethnic understanding of the *Kulturnation*, contains a contradiction and an imbalance inimical to the very project of present and future national integration; “On the one hand, both parts of Germany must grow together after unification. And this integration takes place in the name of ethnic belonging. On the other hand, the integration of immigrants cannot be undertaken in the name of an ethnic nation” (von Thadden, cited in von Dirke 1994, 532).<sup>ii</sup>

Vietnam and Germany share experience of state division and communist government. In the Vietnamese case, communist control became nationwide with the fall of Saigon on April 30<sup>th</sup> 1975 and the creation of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) from the DRV and the RVN in 1976. This political system remains in place, despite the opening up (*đổi mới*) to capital markets and foreign investment ushered in by the 1986 Communist Party Congress. State planning and subsidies have been rolled back in some areas,

including health and education, encouraging the participation of civil society in building a 'socialist market economy' (Thai 2001). In Germany, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1990 marked the official end of East German communism with the accession of the GDR to the FRG. GDR identity was an ideological construct like any other nation-building tool, but its myths and symbols were more *overtly* ideological and its creation relatively recent and raw. It offered disembodied anti-fascism where the FRG offered reassuring territorial continuity; the Federal Constitutional Court ruled in 1973 that the FRG was 'partially identical' with the pre-Nazi Reich, for instance (Knischewski 1996, 133). From 1954 to 1990, the FRG celebrated the 'Day of German Unity' on 17<sup>th</sup> June. This commemorated the GDR worker uprising in 1953, which it interpreted as expressing a desire for reunification (Knischewski 1996, 132). Although West Germany's calls for unity changed over time - the FRG recognising GDR sovereignty in 1972 - they continuously enabled the truncated West German state to construct a coherent claim to represent the whole nation. When the time came in 1989, the FRG set about soldering the states according to its own designs. Chancellor Kohl's use of rhetoric like "our German fatherland", 'our compatriots in the GDR', and 'two states in Germany'" (Knischewski 1996, 140) helped prepare the ground for rapid reunification. The discourse of unity thus remained a constant in the DRV and SRV, as well as in the pre and post-unification FRG. Both the Vietnamese and East German communist parties also sought to combine nation-building and socialist ideology in order to legitimate their regimes, with very different results.

The DRV was at war for most of its existence. Far from being eclipsed by communist ideology, the narrative of Vietnamese resistance to invasion and myths of national resilience and determination continuously fuelled its war effort. Nation-building after World War II blended anti-colonialism, ancient myth and revolutionary fervour, a potent mix personified in the tradition of honouring national heroes like 'Uncle Ho'. At the same time, Ho's communist credentials constitute a central legitimating link between the present government and Vietnam's struggles for independence. The cult of DRV war heroes - and explicitly not RVN war dead, whose graves have been neglected and in some cases razed (Schwenkel 2008, 60) - represents another legitimating tool. Monuments erected to war heroes, and particularly those to 'patriots and revolutionaries', link their bravery to Vietnam's hard-won independence and to the VCP as leader of the revolution (Malarney 2001; Dixon 2004, 17). As such, they continue to be central to the Vietnamese government's legitimacy today; "[The Vietnam-American] war was the mother's milk, the school and the testing-ground of Vietnamese communism. It provides historical justification for the indispensable leadership of the Communist Party" (Pham 2005, no page). The East German SED, on the other hand, attempted to supplement its anti-fascist discourse with reference to home-grown communists, but faced difficulties in accounting for critiques of Lenin penned by the likes of Rosa Luxembourg (Terray 1995, 192). References to Karl Marx and Martin Luther were also ambivalent as, contrary to the FRG, the GDR was unwilling to assume responsibility for acts which did not support the dominant ideology (such as Luther's condemnation of the 1524 peasant revolt). In 1980, SED secretary general Erich Honecker

commented archly; “We cannot possibly run the risk of celebrating the same national heroes as the FRG since you will search in vain for institutions bearing the names of Nazi greats in our country” (cited in McKay 1998, 124). Although it also sought to co-opt eminent cultural figures into its national pantheon, the GDR could not exploit links to a magnificent ancient civilization, as was the VCP’s good fortune.

The bronze drums which have been found in northern Vietnam are generally dated to between 700 and 1000 B.C.E. However, in a conflation of history and myth, nationalist rhetoric does not shy away from asserting Vietnam’s even more ancient origins by evoking the legendary dynasty of Hùng Kings (Pelley 1995, 233). Ho Chi Minh himself is quoted as saying; “The Kings Hung (sic) have founded the country; as for us, we must safeguard it” (cited in Dang 1998, 44). Archaeological interpretation is thus put to use in legitimating the VCP as the latest in a long line of leaders representing the Vietnamese nation. This trend is likely to continue as other credentials associated with war veterans fade with the generations, and new forms of collective action distinct from mass organisations such as the Fatherland Front, become more vocal in Vietnam (Luong 2003, 24; Malarney 1997, 917). The “postcolonial cult of antiquity” (Pelley 1998, 375) also has an impact on the VCP’s regionalist discourse. One example is Vietnam’s contribution to the ASEAN culture week, which took place in Hanoi and Halong City in 2004. The Vietnamese section of the opening performance featured an array of dancers in feathered headdresses, vaguely reminiscent of the characters etched on archaeological artefacts. The prominently displayed replica of a bronze drum

made it clear that this was an evocation of the country's pre-Chinese, Bronze Age culture, appropriately entitled 'Dance of the Ancient Viet'. Although similar drums have been found elsewhere in Southeast Asia, some of the oldest artefacts have been uncovered in Vietnam. As such, this symbolism evokes both a shared regional heritage and a 'race to antiquity' among ASEAN member states (Loofs-Wissowa 1993). It remains to be seen how united Vietnam and Germany reconcile nation-building with regionalism more generally.

### **III Investing in regional integration**

2007 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the EU and ASEAN's fortieth jubilee. ASEAN remains an eminently flexible, intergovernmental organisation based on member state consensus, and is unencumbered by any supranational institutions beyond a permanent secretariat and a series of regular meetings. In this sense, ASEAN differs greatly from the EU, but this does not rule out fruitful comparisons. Despite being "at opposite ends of the spectrum of institutionalised regionalism" (Wunderlich 2006, 2) their fundamentally different nature represents unique responses to international challenges that have been shaped and developed by member states and, in the EU case, its own institutions. Both organisations were born of a shared desire to promote peace and development, but adopted very different principles and strategies in pursuing that aim. Member state understandings of nation-building are one amongst many contextual factors contributing to this divergence. This section argues that it was primarily in Vietnamese and German *national* interests to

take part in regional integration, for historical, political and strategic reasons. Accordingly, regionalism is an integral part of their nation-building ideologies.

When West Germany became a founding member of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952, going on to participate in the European Economic Community from 1957, it saw this as a means to forge a lasting alliance with its erstwhile enemy, France, to underpin its economic recovery with a free trade area and to be rehabilitated as a respected partner on the international political arena following World War II. Other European countries, as well as the United States of America, saw a pressing need to tie West Germany securely to the anti-Soviet bloc in the escalating Cold War, and to monitor the country's reconstruction by integrating key aspects of European trade and industry. Similarly ASEAN, founded in 1967 by Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, had an important, if implicit, anti-communist element (*pace* Tarling 2006, 135). All of its original members feared the impact of domestic and international communist movements on state stability. As a result, one of ASEAN's goals was to provide a regional bulwark against communism in Indochina, consisting of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Today, however, the loose set of guidelines known as the 'ASEAN way' corresponds to key principles of Vietnamese diplomacy as laid down at the ninth VCP Congress in 2001, namely non-interference and respect for independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty. Vietnam's current focus on developing international ties is closely linked to its socio-economic development, for which it requires technical expertise and assistance, whilst

continuing to profess an ideological commitment to the international proletariat and socialism.

#### **IV Vietnamese regionalism**

Vietnam's membership of ASEAN and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), as well as sub-regional initiatives surrounding the Mekong Basin (Dosch & Hensengerth 2005) signals its readiness to engage in supranational dialogue, if not deep integration. The sixth VCP Congress in 1986 saw the introduction of an open door policy known as *đổi mới*, meaning renovation. This brought with it major changes in domestic policy, including the property regime and economic reforms. Despite these, the VCP continues to cling to its interpretation of 'one-party democracy'. It hopes that Vietnam's rapid growth, averaging 7.2% in the decade to 2005 (Economist 2008, 238), will cement the party's legitimacy and its interpretation of national identity, rather than encouraging calls for greater political pluralism. The current revival of religious observance amongst Vietnam's urban elites, for instance, has been interpreted as both an individual response to social change and part of "state attempts to strengthen national identifications as a counterbalance to its policies of economic liberalisation" (Taylor 2003, 383). Taking place a few years before the collapse of European communism, the sixth VCP Congress also heralded changes in Vietnam's foreign policy, and by extension in the official portrayal of national self-understanding. This was strongly linked to its continuing nation-building efforts.



Vietnamese leaders' references to unleashing the nation's 'inner strength' recalled traditions of national determination and resistance. They also attempted to counter disillusionment that decades of war did not bring an end to hardship and privations; "Relative poverty more than 25 years after reunification has hurt the pride of the nation" (Dosch and Ta 2004, 203). The VCP now claims that the strong will, dynamism, creativity and effort of the Vietnamese people were successfully harnessed by *đổi mới* and effective state management (Tran 2005, 13), although people had to be at least as resourceful before then to make ends meet *despite* state policies. During the 1970s, Vietnam had been suspicious of whether ASEAN supported "genuine neutrality" (Narine 2002, 40), given the foreign military bases in Malaysia and the Philippines, as well as Thailand and the Philippines' support for the U.S. in the Vietnam-American war. Throughout the 1980s, ASEAN and Vietnam were on opposite sides of a stand-off over Cambodia (then Kampuchea), where the murderous Khmer Rouge regime had been toppled by a Vietnamese invasion in 1978 and replaced by a client government. Vietnam presented this as a humanitarian intervention. ASEAN saw it as a move to assert Vietnamese dominance over communist Indochina, thereby directly threatening neighbouring Thailand. This conflict realised ASEAN's fears of communist advance.

Vietnam's attempts to draw closer to its ASEAN neighbours in the run-up to the 1978 invasion made it all the more shocking when it came. ASEAN member states were united in condemnation but divided on an appropriate strategic response (Narine 2002, 45). ASEAN's prestige as an international

diplomatic partner was raised through diplomatic initiatives such as the International Conference on Kampuchea in 1981. However, internal tensions between Thailand and Indonesia in particular, coupled with the Superpowers' pursuit of divergent interests in the region, highlighted ASEAN's limited clout. Vietnam, which had declared its intention to withdraw all troops from Cambodia by 1990, accelerated the process as its Soviet ally became weaker and its own domestic reforms demanded external support, notably the normalisation of relations with China and the resumption of suspended aid. Despite the diplomatic stalemate, economic cooperation with ASEAN improved in the 1980s and Vietnam openly indicated its desire eventually to become a member. Trade finally trumped tension with the Paris Peace Treaty of 1991, which determined Cambodia's future under the aegis of the United Nations. Vietnam's accession to ASEAN in 1995 signalled its readiness to pursue regionalism as part of its continuing nation-building project. This step can be seen as part of a wider strategy in response to the collapse of communism, premised on the view that "regional institutions can assist the state-building process" (Narine 2004, 444).

The tension between the theory and practice of ASEAN integration can be added to that between national interests and ASEAN credibility, as well as institution-building and actual cooperation (Boisseau du Rocher 1998, 107). If regionalism is about fostering mutual understanding and international prestige, it is also about reinforcing each member state's domestic legitimacy (Boisseau du Rocher 1998, 107). Just as state visits have an important symbolic function (viz. Bill Clinton's visit to Vietnam in 2000 as the first U.S.

president to set foot in unified Vietnam), so the symbolism of ASEAN cooperation is at least as significant as its concrete achievements. In ideological terms, it was of prime importance for the founding members to signal their unity vis-à-vis what they considered the Vietnamese threat throughout the 1970s and, in the 1980s, against domestic instability in the Philippines and elsewhere. Yet only after the end of the Vietnamese – American war did ASEAN heads of government first come together to be formally associated with the fledgling organisation, whose affairs had hitherto been left to foreign ministers. The 1976 Bali summit not only gave the organisation a higher profile, but also resulted in the decision to create a more robust institutional structure. By the 1990s, the end of the Cold War, peace in Cambodia and the departure of U.S. troops from the Philippines called for new impetus. The Singapore summit in 1992 accordingly focused on economic and security cooperation, as well as the need to restructure ASEAN internally. The agreement to create an Asian Free Trade Area (AFTA) can be understood as a response to the creation of a single market in the EU and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), even if actual progress on reducing tariff barriers has been slow. Another ASEAN initiative, the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) joined the congeries of groupings testifying to political will, if not assiduous implementation. ASEAN's slow reaction to the 1997 Asian financial crisis and lacklustre condemnation of the Burmese government's spectacular failings further demonstrate the misfit between symbolic cooperation and concrete action.

By the year 2000, Vietnam had diplomatic ties with one hundred and sixty-seven countries, compared to twenty-three states sharing its ideological opposition to capitalism in 1989 (Dosch and Ta 2004, 197). ASEAN's integration of its erstwhile enemy was a sign of changing times. The Vietnamese government was anxious to end its isolation as a political pariah and become an accepted partner for regional and international trade and investment. ASEAN's founding members, in turn, were keen to unite against a new threat in the post-Cold War era, that of regional insignificance. Sandwiched between the fast-developing economies of India and China, they wanted to assert themselves on a newly-configured world stage and resist outsiders' attempts to impose their will on the region (Ramcharan 2003). It was unthinkable that regional integration could be at the *expense* of strong state sovereignty. On the contrary, in member states' regionalist thinking, sovereignty was seen as a "necessary *prerequisite*" (Narine 2004, 444, emphasis in original).

ASEAN functions according to the principles of non-interference and decision-making by consensus, known collectively as 'the ASEAN way'. Its emphasis on respecting territorial sovereignty offers a means of reconciling regionalisation with nation-building. Vietnam, long considered a destabilizing factor in the region, has made conspicuous efforts to demonstrate both its regional commitment and ability to lead, hosting ASEAN summits, initiating the ASEAN culture week and organising other regional events such as the 2003 South-East Asian games, the 2004 Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) and the 2006 APEC summit in Hanoi. This helps to strengthen perceptions of

South-East Asia as a region, at least among elites, whilst establishing Vietnam as an international player (Sutherland 2005b). Vietnam has carefully constructed its move from describing ASEAN as a hostile, capitalist, 'NATO-type' organisation to embracing membership. The VCP now claims that "the present enemy of Vietnam is poverty and backwardness, and the friend of Vietnam is everybody who is willing to co-operate with and help us to push back poverty and backwardness" (Tran, cited in Dosch and Ta 2004, 200). This militaristic rhetoric recalls not only that of the war years, but also the official language of struggle and heroism used since then to motivate the population in facing new challenges (P. Taylor 2001, 28). ASEAN membership thereby plays both to domestic legitimacy and external sovereignty; it helps define a new enemy against which the VCP can lead the people, whilst at the same time seeking to bolster its international recognition.

Membership of ASEAN signals a shift from military to political and economic security. Although Vietnam still officially pursues 'socialist construction' in the creation of a 'socialist market economy', this rhetoric has not hindered substantial foreign direct investment and development aid from both donor countries and international organisations like the World Bank. After all, "the Vietnamese bureaucracy is well schooled in slogans" (Templer 1998, 148) and its stated commitment to reform has been conducive to international cooperation. Despite important regional and ethnic disparities and a growing income differential (Luong 2003, 16), Vietnam's success in reducing poverty since the 1990s makes it attractive to aid agencies, which are keen to see their projects lead to measurable results. Yet Vietnam retains a vigorous "self-

belief” (Gainsborough 2002, 704) derived from its national myth of resistance, which makes it less vulnerable to international pressure than neighbouring states such as Laos and Cambodia. Foreign aid donors have found this to their cost; the democratic agenda behind the World Bank’s good governance programme has made little headway in Vietnam, for instance (Zingerli 2004, 55). Instead, the Vietnamese government implements its explicit aim of “absorbing external resources long and consistently (sic)” (VCP Central Committee 1997, cited in Dinh 2006, 9) whilst “ensuring independence, self-control and socialist orientation” (Polit Bureau 2001, cited in Dinh 2006, 10). For the time being, the ‘ASEAN way’ poses no threat to that vision. On the contrary, it is calculated to strengthen international economic and political clout whilst maintaining ideological orthodoxy at home. Both internal and external sovereignty must be secure for Vietnam to countenance any form of cooperation, including regional integration.

Given that respect for national sovereignty is a core feature of the ‘ASEAN Way’, (Palmujoki 2001, 8), ASEAN member states would dispute the following assessment of the concept;

[S]tate sovereignty has been eroded by the notion that the international community has obligations towards individual members of other states. Action on this idea of political legitimacy runs counter to the notion of the territorial integrity of states and the absolute sovereignty of states over their internal affairs (Moore 2001, 46).

Neither do they appreciate external interference from outside the region. ASEAN member states are hostile towards attempts by the likes of the EU to tie human rights conditionality clauses to trade agreements, for instance. In some cases, they justify this using arguments that human rights are not universal or that 'Asian values' prioritise so-called second generation rights – to work, for instance – over first generation human rights like freedom of speech, association and religion (Sutherland 2006b). Member states see the ability to present a united front against international pressures as a positive feature of the organisation, although the failings of fellow member states such as Burma are also a source of embarrassment (Agence France Presse 2006). When the ASEAN Culture Week took place in Hanoi and Hải Phòng in 2004, Vietnam's then Prime Minister Phan Văn Khải expressed his support for ASEAN's fundamental principles and "the flexible and wise combination of the interests of each nation and of the whole region" (Vietnam News 2004). Indeed, the Vietnamese government first initiated the ASEAN culture week as a means of "fostering a sense of regional identity" (ASEAN Secretariat 2004). Declarations of principle can be an effective way of signalling unity without ceding sovereignty. It is unclear, for instance, whether Vietnam would accept the proposed ASEAN human rights commission (International Herald Tribune 2007), with all the implications for domestic sovereignty this entails. This is one instance where Vietnam's regionalist rhetoric conflicts with the pressure of actual regionalisation. Nevertheless, the strategic advantage of ASEAN membership in strengthening South-East Asia's presence on the world stage is not currently tempered by lost sovereignty or onerous international constraints, and so does not undermine Vietnam's nation-building ideology.

The key consideration underpinning the future of ASEAN remains unchanged; “[T]he best prospect for institutional development in the Asia-Pacific is still that states believe that regional institutions can assist the state-building process” (Narine 2004, 444).

Despite lofty aspirations, enshrined in ASEAN’s Hanoi (1999) and Vientiane (2004) Action Plans, the organisation remains resolutely intergovernmental. Moves towards creating an Asian Free Trade Area have made slow progress, despite ambitions for a regional economic zone modelled on the European Union by 2015 (Tuổi Trẻ Online 2006). Vietnamese foreign policy continues to be officially articulated in nationalist and socialist terms. In turn, this is linked to principles of Ho Chi Minh’s thought, which has been put on a par with Marxist-Leninist doctrine in Vietnam. One of the VCP’s central, explicit aims is to develop the economy in order to narrow the gap with regional neighbours. The new focus on ‘economic emulation’ over Cold War cleavages, however, is couched in a firm and oft-repeated commitment to upholding “national sovereignty, territorial integrity, national unification” (Dinh 2006, 1). The VCP’s regionalism is premised on its potential to rescue or “buttress” (Milward 1994, 3) the nation-state without even symbolically ‘pooling’ sovereignty at the ASEAN level. The regionalist element in Vietnam’s nation-building discourse can well afford to be positive, as it currently offers the ‘win-win’ prospect of enhancing both domestic legitimacy and external sovereignty.



## **V German regionalism**

The core aim of the 1950 Schumann declaration, which prepared the ground for the European Coal and Steel Community as the first step in European integration, was to make war “materially impossible”. This was to be achieved by locking the major powers of France and Germany, who had been at war three times in the past century, into cooperation over vital defence industries. It was also clear to the six founding members and other Western powers like the United States and the United Kingdom that European integration was a means of controlling Germany economically and politically (Anderson 2005, 78). In turn, the preamble of the West German Basic Law unequivocally anchored it within the European project, as “an equal member of a united Europe”. The prominence given to this self-understanding signals the importance of European integration as a positive focus of German identity. Despite being predominantly economic in practice, integration was always a highly political project for successive West German governments, entrenching the FRG ideologically as a member of the Western bloc and in opposition to the GDR. Economic integration also fitted well with the identity-promoting aspects of the FRG’s post-war *Wirtschaftswunder*, or economic miracle.

West Germany’s first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, was committed to building trust with international partners, particularly France; “If this meant subordinating the German state to Western or European political institutions, he was not inclined to object” (Weber & Kowert 2007, 51). In this he fundamentally disagreed with the opposition leader of the social democrats (SPD), Kurt Schumacher, who advocated German self-determination as a

precondition for international cooperation, and not vice versa (Schweiger 2007, 45). Schumacher believed that respect for national rights would prevent a return to right-wing nationalism, whereas Adenauer was of the view that German affairs, including the question of unification, would have to be embedded in a multilateral, but resolutely Western approach. Adenauer was under no illusions that reunification was unrealistic in the prevailing Cold War climate. However, his *Westpolitik* would come to be complemented by Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* during Brandt's time as foreign minister in a grand SPD/CDU coalition from 1966-69, and then as chancellor of an SPD/FDP coalition from 1969 until his resignation in 1974. This *Ostpolitik* included direct contact with the GDR (rather than through the Soviet Union) and recognition of the Oder-Neisse line as marking Germany's eastern border. Brandt was also committed to pursuing national unity, which he carefully distinguished from right-wing nationalism. Some continuity in government policy can be seen in the extent to which Brandt, like Adenauer, valued informal multilateralism and trust-building over a strict, legalistic approach to international relations. Again like Adenauer, Brandt also emphasised an internationally embedded Germany as a precondition of unity; "There can only be a European answer to the German question" (Brandt, cited in Weber & Kowert 2007, 85). This, he stressed, was as much in Germany's interests as European peace and good East-West relations, underlining the extent to which Germany's fate was bound up with Europe's ideological division (Schweiger 2007, 49). In practical terms, Brandt's policy of *détente* with the East also had to be pursued in close cooperation with European allies, under the terms agreed in the 1955 *Deutschlandvertrag*.

On becoming chancellor in 1982, Helmut Kohl would explicitly adopt the internationalist approach to German unification, arguing that “we all want to transcend the division of Europe and, within it, the division of our fatherland” (cited in Weber & Kowert 2007, 95; Wood 1998, 320). His decision to host GDR leader Erich Honecker on a ‘working visit’ to the FRG in 1987, and his key role in moving quickly towards unification, also have similarities with Brandt’s pragmatic approach to German-German relations. For one, they were based on an assertion of ongoing German national unity (Zückert & Zückert 1993, 140). This contrasts with the SPD’s much more cautious attitude to unification which, though it proved to be well-founded, did not chime with the mood of the time. Oskar Lafontaine, the SPD chancellor candidate in the 1990 federal elections, called for a new constitution giving due weight to East German wishes and the slow development of a fresh institutional set-up. Indeed, his overall political outlook was so internationalist that in 1989 he called for a United States of Europe (already mooted by Winston Churchill in 1946) and looked forward to a time which “will make national state concepts out of date” (Lafontaine, cited in Weber & Kowert 2007, 104). Lafontaine’s distaste for nationalism extended to all its manifestations. He sought to supersede the nation-state completely in the spirit of the 1968 generation, and perhaps also realise the transnational flavour of his regional *Heimat*, the federal state of Saarland on the French border. Even though they saw unification differently, both Kohl and Lafontaine were therefore committed to embedding Germany further in an international framework. Kohl would demonstrate this in his support for the

1992 Treaty on European Union (also known as the Treaty of Maastricht), with its goals of economic and monetary union and a common foreign and security policy.

The EU was long regarded positively in post-war West Germany as an alternative project to the difficult process of nation-building. This “often led to an almost artificial denial of national sentiments and an exaggeration of European idealism” (Schweiger 2007, 46). Successive West German leaders seemed to equate the country’s interests with those of the EU, perpetuating the close link between German and European identity in their nation-building ideology. European integration became more problematic in the 1990s, however, as Germany was faced with the social and economic consequences of unification. The so-called ‘normalisation’ of united Germany’s international status also threw the strategic nature of its pro-integrationist stance into stark relief. For some conservative journalists, politicians and historians, unification signalled the end of the post-war era and an invitation to reassess Germany’s role in Europe. A more critical approach towards European allies was articulated in the widely read, conservative broadsheet *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) and news magazines like the weekly *Spiegel*, in particular by its editor Rudolf Augstein. He used its pages explicitly to demand full German sovereignty and, in no uncertain terms, that “all four of the victorious Allied powers (*Siegermächte*) should get out of Berlin” (Augstein, cited in Wiegel 2001, 155).<sup>iii</sup> This also influenced the argument that German nation-building was no longer beholden to European integration as it once was. Other media commentators such as Günter Wetzel, writing in the FAZ, were of the view

that state sovereignty should henceforth trump the long-standing policy of *Westbindung*, one which according to him had always undermined the Basic Law's commitment to unification (Wiegel 2001, 157). This view ran counter to a vision of the nation-state as embedded within - rather than antagonistic towards - regional structures. Yet the embedded approach continued to be favoured by both Chancellor Kohl's foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and his Green party successor in 1998, Joschka Fischer, who was explicit in calling for a federal Europe to transcend the nation-state. Kohl himself, though he was to be remembered as the 'chancellor of unity', was at pains to reassure his EU partners that reunification should take place within a strong European framework. During the 1990s, the official national narrative of pacifism, openness to asylum-seekers and a commitment to Europe as enshrined in the German Basic Law was nonetheless being revised. The relationship between regionalism and nationalism had to be thrashed out anew.

Whilst seeking to preserve and expand the EU framework, Kohl was also keen to promote a new sense of national identity during his chancellorship, which coincided with a reassessment of Germany's Nazi past. The conservative historian Ernst Nolte led the fray in the so-called *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s. His highly controversial, revisionist reading of Hitler and the Holocaust sought to question the apportioning of collective guilt on Germans and to relativise the horrors of Nazism in the context of Stalinism. Berlin, the carved up centre of the continued Allied presence since World War II, and the semiotics of its monuments also played a part in the debate. In

Nolte's view, a project such as the planned holocaust memorial in Berlin embodied everything that was wrong with a 'totalising', anti-German discourse. Instead, Nolte argued that it should be dedicated to all the victims of what he called twentieth-century 'ideological states' (*Ideologiestaaten*) (Wiegel 2001, 389), a clear reference to the Soviet Union. Kohl himself waded in with his proposal for a German Historical Museum, a plan which was formally adopted to coincide with Berlin's 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1987. Together with the reassessment of Nazism, this was an important element in what has been defined as a neo-conservative process of 'renationalisation' beginning in the 1980s, aiming for "the homogenisation of the German people, which could then present itself as a closed unit in international competition"<sup>iv</sup> (Wiegel 2001, 13). Understood as a cultural discourse encompassing both historiography and the shift to a Christian Democrat majority government in 1982, 'renationalisation' sought to challenge more left-wing interpretations of German identity which had flourished since the 1960s.

Like Adenauer, who had pursued a canny policy of reassuring his European allies whilst establishing limited German sovereignty and achieving NATO membership by 1955, Kohl regarded regionalism as an asset to nation-building. Yet the prospect of German reunification in 1990 rekindled fears, notably in France and the United Kingdom, that an enlarged and economically powerful Germany might pose a future threat. These fears proved to be largely unfounded, as the East German 'blooming landscapes' promised by Kohl failed to materialise, and the economy struggled with the crippling cost of reunification. By signing up for Economic and Monetary Union at Maastricht in

1992, Germany gave up the *Deutschmark* – “almost a national monument” in itself (Fulbrook 2001, 228) - in return for promises of closer political integration. Once again, Germany regarded this as furthering its constitutionally entrenched aim to be “an equal member of a united Europe,” but also as a politically expedient means of shifting responsibility for controversial asylum and immigration regulations to the European level. With the *Deutschmark*, however, went a strong, tangible symbol of West German values, one which Jürgen Habermas’ advocacy of rather abstract constitutional patriotism could not replace (Habermas 1996, 133). Little heed was paid to the fact that former citizens of the GDR were having to handle their third currency in twelve years.

The SED had been shadow-boxing with the FRG throughout the GDR’s existence. Politically, a cornerstone of official GDR nation-building attributed all Nazi perpetrators and guilt to West Germany. Economically, the SED had vowed to catch-up with and overtake the FRG. Culturally, the SED claimed to be the true guardian of Goethe, Schiller and others’ legacies, backing this with investment in museum collections such as the *Museum für deutsche Geschichte* in Berlin. From the 1960s onwards, however, it moved to replace the adjective ‘German’ in official discourse with ‘GDR’, in an attempt to establish its particularity and repudiate any West German links. Ironically, this GDR identity remained largely semantic until the dying days of the regime, when it provided a focus for reform-minded citizens, and retrospectively for those aspects of GDR life *not* associated with the authorities. Although the SED’s nation-building ideology failed to achieve its legitimising end, this

makes its construction no less intriguing. Indeed, SED ideologues performed interpretational acrobatics in order to dissociate historical figures from unacceptable associations and turn them into 'socialist national' heroes of an East German stamp. Some historical interpretations in unified Germany could be criticised as no less subtle.

Many of the discussions surrounding the perceived lack of 'inner unity' in Germany today do not examine the presumption of nationhood on which they are based. Paradoxically, one commentator claimed in 1963 that the experience of being torn apart was actually constitutive of German identity (Enzensberger, cited in Brunssen 2002, 23). Today, others argue that whilst both East and West Germany sought to define themselves in opposition to the Third Reich (and each other), post-unification Germany tends to measure itself against West Germany's positively portrayed *Erfolgsgeschichte*, or success story (Brunssen 2002, 19). This, in turn, is reflected in its negative depiction of the GDR, which includes drawing parallels between SED authoritarianism and Nazism, the GDR's problematic characterisation as an *Unrechtsstaat*, and intense scrutiny of the secret police and the Berlin Wall over other aspects of East German history. One prominent proponent of this discourse was the *Enquete Commission*, a body composed of German federal parliamentarians. Conceived as an alternative to the truth and reconciliation commissions created in post-apartheid South Africa, post-Pinochet Chile and elsewhere, it was tasked with investigating the legacy of the GDR for the Berlin republic. Avowedly political, its conclusions clearly supported an "anti-totalitarian consensus" in comparing the authoritarianism of the Third Reich to



the GDR (Cooke 2005, 38). The idea of German unity was also upheld in the portrayal of the GDR as an illegitimate “aberration of history” (Cooke 2005, 40) as opposed to a constitutive part of contemporary Germany’s heritage. The overriding emphasis on the iniquities of the GDR system served to cast the FRG, and the West German politicians turned historians on the commission, in a better light. As such, this eminently politicised reckoning with the past did not extend to any possible shortcomings within the FRG (Fulbrook 1994, endnote 3). Rather ironically given its own partisan approach, the commission’s 1994 report urged readers not to forget “the horrors of the fallen dictatorship [...] in the face of an undifferentiated ‘GDR nostalgia’” (cited in McAdams 2001, 111). It thereby reinforced a nation-building project premised on the greater validity of the West German experience and continuity between the Bonn and Berlin republics. Its interpretation of history left little scope for examining the complex legacy of life in the GDR and “probably did more to impede inter-German understanding than to further it” (McAdams 2001, 20). An alternative report “from left-wing standpoints” (Allinson 2001, 50) sought to emphasise lived experience in the GDR over its ideology and institutions, but the two main reports’ harsh condemnation of all things East German remain more indicative of the dominant discourse.

Vietnamese and German history briefly collided due to the worldwide repercussions of the Vietnam-American war. Fuelled by the media impact of events such as the 1968 Tet offensive, emerging evidence of the My Lai massacre and a constant stream of searing photojournalism, the DRV was widely seen internationally as the victim of U.S. aggression. In Germany too, it

was used as a role model for resistance. Rudi Dutschke, leader of the German student movement, drew parallels between the anti-authoritarianism of his cause and Vietnamese communist struggle. On the other hand, opposing, pro-US factions equated the defence of the RVN with that of West Berlin in a Cold War comparison writ large (Davies 2007). Germany was also beginning its own “debates over Germans as either perpetrators or victims” of Nazism (Green *et al* 2008, 19). This would continue into the 1990s with the publication in 1997 of Daniel Goldhagen’s book entitled ‘Hitler’s willing Executioners’ and the *Wehrmachtausstellung*, an exhibition exploring the extent to which ordinary soldiers had been implicated in Nazi atrocities. The debate hinged on whether the German people should be portrayed as the victims of war, terror and devastation wrought by a relatively small, murderous elite, or carry some of the blame themselves. The GDR’s anti-fascist myth, on the other hand, had clearly exonerated its citizens from any responsibility, whilst pointing to West Germany’s aborted denazification as evidence of continuity with the fascist regime. The absorption of many former Nazis into its own socialist system was simply passed over in favour of this clear ideological line, as was any meaningful coming to terms with the past. Meanwhile, historical continuity between the GDR and Germany’s pre-Nazi past was manufactured through a workers’ narrative and official reverence towards cultural icons. Its celebrations of these figures paralleled the VCP’s commemoration of selected Vietnamese heroes and role models (Pelley 2002, 173), a widespread practice across the communist world.

West Germany's freedom of expression naturally gave rise to greater ambiguity regarding victims, perpetrators and the related question of historical continuity. Did the Third Reich represent an unbridgeable caesura, or was Germany's post-war status an 'unnatural' division hindering a return to Germany's rightful historical path, as the term *reunification* suggested? These interpretations, highly politicised and polarised as they were, presuppose a shared yearning for a single narrative thread uniting Germany across both space and time, regardless of whether the chosen starting point is taken as Bismarck's political creation of 1871 or a prior, ethno-symbolist *Kulturation*. They also all recognised one victim of the Nazi period, namely German national identity, though views differed widely on whether it should be rehabilitated (Schwilk and Schacht 1994) or forever laid to rest in favour of an internationalist outlook. In policy terms, the Bonn republic's foreign policy "was shaped by a binary objective of recreating a united Germany in a united Europe" (Wood 1998, 320), yet the nature of the nation justifying this goal remained open to question, not least due to the issue of immigration. German unification in 1990 put West German politics and economics from *Westbindung* to the *Wirtschaftswunder* in wider historical perspective, with a significant strand of neo-conservative opinion arguing for a return to 'national normality' unhindered by war guilt. The shift in focus to "the image of a nation legitimated through tradition and history [experienced] Germany's fascist past as a block on that unbroken, positive relationship to history" (Wiegel 2001, 178).<sup>v</sup> All these strands of opinion revolved around the question of how to define a united German nation.

## Conclusion

Germany and Vietnam share a presumption of national unity despite decades of division. In contrast to Germany, however, positively connoted national patriotism has been identified as one of the most important features of the Vietnamese mental world (Pham *et al* 2001, 14). The Vietnamese experienced the clash with French colonial culture as an awakening. This led to various forms of nationalist resistance, with the VCP eventually emerging victorious. However, one particular difficulty encountered by the VCP has been to integrate the Vietnamese south into a nation-building narrative. The southern “history of intense engagement with the capitalist world [has resulted in] attempts by the central government to eliminate and, failing that, assimilate these legacies, while trying to retain power in an era of globalised capitalism” (P. Taylor 2001, 193). It is dangerous to assume that political developments in Asia will necessarily lead to Western-style liberal democracy (Gainsborough 2002, 696). The 2006 coup in Thailand, until recently considered a standard bearer of South-East Asian democracy, is a case in point. The 1990s rhetoric of prominent leaders such as Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysia’s Mahathir Mohamad is another (Mahathir & Ishihara 1995; Sutherland 2006b). Neither can social scientists measure popular legitimacy in South-East Asia through the blunt instrument of the ballot box, and more sophisticated methods are being developed and tested (White 2005). Yet official nation-building in Vietnam is nevertheless based on the pursuit of popular legitimacy and state sovereignty. The latter might seem increasingly untenable in the context of globalisation, but the concept of sovereignty is still

useful in linking nation-state legitimacy with the wider regional context to which it must adapt. Recent studies of the Vietnamese state highlight great variations in its degree of penetration and control over different areas of the political system (Dixon 2004, 16). The present political climate is also a mixture of tolerance and periodic clampdowns. The case of Vietnamese nation-building in ASEAN has shown that regionalism can be reconciled with a nation-building project, similar to Germany within the EU. In Vietnam, this has been achieved by subordinating regionalism to an existing political ideology. In united Germany, despite 'normalisation' and a return to full sovereignty, by extending West Germany's commitment to European integration into the twenty-first century. Regionalism can thus be used to bolster both national legitimacy and external sovereignty; "ASEAN is [designed] to support Southeast Asian nation-building" (Palmujoki 2001, 14). Likewise, the EU framework reassures Germany's partners and its own governments that nation-building can take place without slipping into chauvinistic nationalism. It remains to be seen how nation-building actually takes place through a range of empirical examples considered in the following chapters.

---

<sup>i</sup> „Ich kam von Deutschland nach Deutschland, war der Sprache mächtig - und verstand kein Wort. Warum? Weil das kulturelle und politische Koordinatensystem der Gesellschaft, in die ich nun geraten war, so anders war, als jenes, das ich kannte. Ich kam mir vor wie in einem fremden Land.“

<sup>ii</sup> „Einerseits müssen die beiden Teile Deutschlands nach der Vereinigung

---

zusammenwachsen. Und diese Eingliederung geschieht im Namen der ethnischen Zusammengehörigkeit. Auf der anderen Seite kann die Integration der Einwanderer jedoch nicht im Namen einer ethnischen Nation vollzogen werden.“

<sup>iii</sup> „[...] darum sollen alle vier Siegermächte aus Berlin verschwinden.“

<sup>iv</sup> „[...] die Homogenisierung der deutschen Bevölkerung [...] die sich so als geschlossene Einheit im internationalen Konkurrenzkampf präsentieren soll“

<sup>v</sup> „[...] die Vorstellung der durch Tradition und Geschichte legitimierten Nation [...] Die faschistische deutsche Vergangenheit als Blockade jedes ungebrochen positiven Bezugs auf die Geschichte ist demnach für beide Richtungen des Neokonservatismus ein gravierendes Problem, dem mittels Relativierung, Historisierung und offener Umwertung begegnet wird.“